

THE
NATURE and CAUSES
OF *4473 e 26*
1-17
Irresolution in Religion,

AND THE
REASONABLENESS

OF A
Thorough Determination

Represented in

THREE SERMONS

ON

ACTS xxviii, 29.

The Substance of which was preached at *Northampton,*
May 16, 1742.

By *SAMUEL CLARK.*

Published at the DESIRE of those who heard them.

L O N D O N :

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THE
NATURAL
HISTORY
OF
THE
ISLANDS
OF
THE
INDIAN
ARCHIPELAGO



TO the CONGREGATION of *Protestant Dissenters*,
under the Pastoral Care of the Rev. Dr. Dodde-
ridge, at Northampton.

My dear Friends,

TH O' I had long resolved against printing any of my Discourses from the Pulpit, as knowing how little they could merit the Regard of the Public, among so many excellent Sermons already published, and was still less inclined to give that Distinction to these, which were drawn up without any such View, and with nothing of that Exactness proper to appear before the World; yet, as you were pleased to declare they had made great Impressions on those who heard them, and that you were persuaded, that, by the Blessing of God, they might be farther useful, if made more public, I found myself obliged to give Way to your Request: Which I did the rather, because I have sometimes observed, that the plainest Discourses, that had nothing to recommend them but the Importance of the Subject, and the Zeal with which it was recommended, have been made more useful than some that were more elaborate and adorn'd. And to this Prospect I willingly sacrifice every other Consideration. I shall think myself happy, if these plain Discourses may but be effectual to rouse any out of the Coldness and Indifference to Religion, so common now-a-days; and to expose the Unreasonableness of that Spirit of Scepticism, so much in Fashion.

It was with great Pleasure I observed among you such a lively Sense of Religion, and its great Truths, appearing in your diligent and serious Attendance upon the publick Worship of God, your frequent Meetings in private for Prayer and mutual Edification; the religious Order of your Families; your regular and exemplary Conversation, and pious Zeal for promoting the

Interests

Interests of Religion ; the flourishing State of your Church, and the Improvement of the great Advantages you enjoy under the Ministry of your pious and learned Pastor, give me great Reason to congratulate you and myself upon the Influence I had in engaging him to accept of the Call you gave him, and press'd with so much Importunity and Affection. And the rather, as that which was the principal Objection against his undertaking the pastoral Charge of so large a Congregation, the Academy under his Care, has proved, by the Doctor's wise and pious Management, of great Use for the carrying on the Ends of his Ministry among you : And the several Services the young Students are employ'd in, for the Advancement of the Life and Power of Religion in the Congregation and Neighbourhood, do both prepare themselves for that Work of the Ministry, to which they are training up, and at the same Time contribute in various Ways, and in an extensive Manner to your Edification.

I heartily pray God to pour out his Spirit upon you, your valuable Pastor, and that hopeful Nursery of Youth under his Tuition, in a rich Abundance of its Gifts and Graces ; that you may, under his edifying Ministrations, still grow and flourish more and more, and walking in the Fear of the Lord, and the Comforts of the Holy Ghost, be multiplied ; that many young Persons may, by his pious and learned Instructions, be fitted for distinguished Usefulness ; and that he may long be preserved in a Capacity for those eminent Services in which the Providence of God has employ'd him for the Benefit of his Church. These are the earnest Prayers of,

My good Friends,

Your affectionate humble Servant in Christ,

S. CLARK.

The Nature and Causes of IRRESOLUTION in RELIGION consider'd.

S E R M O N I.

ACTS xxvi. 28.

Then said Agrippa unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

IN this Chapter, we have an Account of the Defence *Paul* made for himself before King *Agrippa*, the Roman Governor, and a great Company of Nobility and Gentry, the chief of the Land of *Judea*; in which is observable, the Beauty and Force of the most persuasive Eloquence, the Sincerity of the Christian, and the Authority and Majesty of the Apostle. The Manner in which he spake, drew from *Festus* a Confession of his great Learning: tho' his Ignorance and Unacquaintedness with the great Truths of the Gospel, the Subject of *Paul's* Discourse, made him reflect upon him as mad; from which unjust Reflection, *Paul* vindicates himself in a very handsome Manner, by modestly denying the Charge, and appealing to King *Agrippa* for the Truth of those Matters of Fact, concerning which he spake.

In his Speech, after an *engaging Address* to King *Agrippa*, to gain his favourable Attention, he gives an Account of that wonderful Providence, by which he was obliged to become, of a most zeal-

ous and bigoted Jew and Persecutor of Christianity, the Professor and Teacher of it, the only Cause of the Jews Hatred of him; and observes, that what he taught was no other than what Moses and the Prophets had foretold; *that Christ should suffer, and rise from the Dead, and shew Light unto the People and to the Gentiles*, Ver. 23.

These Things, says he, *were not done in a Corner*. The Christians of that Day could confidently appeal to the whole World for the Truth of those Facts, which were the Foundation of the Christian Religion, that is, the Miracles, the Sufferings, and Death of Christ: Even the blindest and most hardened Infidel in the Land of Judea could not deny them: which Facts, compared with the Prophecies of the Old Testament, were abundantly sufficient Evidences of the Truth of the Gospel. Upon this Ground he asks that Question, *Believest thou the Prophets?* Agrippa was, by Nation and Profession, a Jew; Paul therefore, as it were, begging Pardon for making a Doubt of this, answers for him, *I know that thou believest*. The Conclusion therefore which he leaves him to draw from thence, was this; Since thou believest the Prophets, and what they foretold of the Messiah is so fully accomplished in *Jesus of Nazareth*, and thou thy self knowest the great and wonderful Things that have been wrought by him, and by his Power and Name, thou canst not but own the Truth of the Gospel, and that I have done well to obey the Heavenly Vision, in preaching *Jesus of Nazareth* as the Christ. It was because Agrippa saw the Force of the Argument, that he expresses himself as he does in the Text;

Almost, or within a little, *thou persuadest me to be a Christian*. Some think it very unlikely *Agrippa* should make such a Confession as this before the *Roman* Governor, and all that Audience, and therefore understand the Words, as if spoken ironically; Dost thou think, *Paul*, so easily to make a *Christian* of me? No, it will not be done so soon as thou imaginest. But, as the Force and Evidence with which *Paul* spake, might well draw from *Agrippa* such a Confession, without Regard to his Audience, so the Answer *Paul* made him, plainly shews, that he understood the King as we do, and not as speaking ironically. Besides, that the favourable Opinion he gives of *Paul's* Case afterward, shews that he was in a particular Manner moved by what *Paul* said. So quick and powerful is the Word of God! so fully was *Christ's* Promise to his Disciples accomplished, that *when they were called before Kings and Governors, it should be given them in that Hour what to speak*, Matt. x. 18, 19. and that he *would give them a Mouth and Wisdom, which all their Adversaries should not be able to resist*, Luke xxi. 15. We see then, so great was the Evidence and Force of what the Apostle delivered, that the King owns himself almost persuaded to become a *Christian*. And why not altogether? Was it for want of sufficient Arguments? No certainly, the Reasons the Apostle gave, were so convincing, that would he have continued his Attention to them, would he have taken them thoroughly into Consideration, he must have been not only almost, but altogether persuaded. The Miracles, he knew, and the whole Nation of the *Jews* knew, that *Christ* and his Disciples

wrought; the exact Accomplishment of all the ancient Prophecies; and the miraculous Conversion of the Apostle *Paul* himself, who there gave his Testimony before them all; these were sufficient for Conviction: especially when joined with the holy Life and Doctrine of *Christ*, so suitable and agreeable, in all Respects, to the Word of God in the Old Testament. It was not, therefore, for want of Evidence, that he was only almost persuaded, but for want of due Consideration and Attention. He would not give himself Leave and Leisure thoroughly to consider these Things, agreeably to their Importance. He was in Haste, and had other Things to mind. Besides, it might look too little for him, who was a King, to be so easily persuaded by *Paul* the Prisoner, to fall in with a Doctrine that was universally despised and slighted. It might bring him into Contempt with the *Roman* Governor, and expose him to the Hatred of the *Jews*, if he had taken upon himself the Profession of the Name of *Christ*. Nor did the Purity and Holiness of the Doctrine and Laws of *Christ*, agree with his Inclinations and Lusts; he must have broken off his unlawful Commerce with *Berenice*, his Sister, and have led a more regular Course of Life, if he would be a *Christian* indeed. Now these were invincible Obstacles in the Way of his becoming a thorough *Christian*. So that tho' he was, by the Force of Truth, almost persuaded, yet he still persisted in his Infidelity to the last; and, as History assures us, perished in it.

This Story, therefore, affords a very instructive, and a very important Lesson. In how lively a Manner does this King represent the Case of Multitudes

titudes in our Day, who are often almost persuaded to become *Christians*, that is, true, sincere, and faithful Subjects of *Christ*; yet, thro' the Power of their Lusts, and their Love to the World, never are thoroughly persuaded, can never come to a full Resolution. In one Sense, indeed, they are *Christians*, that is, they profess the *Christian* Name, being bred up in it, and they, perhaps, see the Evidence of the Truth of the Gospel, so that they can't but believe it. One may appeal to them, as *Paul* to *Agrippa*. But they are not yet persuaded to be *Christians* indeed, the Subjects of *Christ*, and to govern themselves by his holy Laws.

That this may be of the greater Use to us,

I. I shall describe the Case of those who are almost persuaded to become sincere *Christians*, or true Converts, but not altogether.

II. I shall shew whence it is that they are not altogether persuaded. And,

III. Represent their sad and unhappy Condition, as a Caution to us all; and so make way for the Exhortation I intend from the following Words of the Apostle *Paul*; that we would be not only almost, but altogether *Christians*.

I. We are to describe the Case of those who are, or seem to be almost persuaded to devote themselves sincerely to *Christ*, but not altogether.

I am not here giving you the Character of one who is but an *almost Christian*, or Hypocrite, as some have used this Expression, of Persons that are *Christians* but in Part, or have the Resemblance and Form of Religion, without the Substance and Power

Power of it ; this not being the Case in the Text. But I speak of those who when the Reasonableness and Necessity of real Religion hath been at any Time, or by any Means, pressed upon their Minds, are ready to entertain some Thoughts of complying with those Instructions, and of giving themselves up to the Service of God in *Christ*; but yet are not come, and perhaps, never do come to a thorough Resolution upon it; never are wholly persuaded; tho' they often seem to themselves, and, it may be, to others, to be almost persuaded, they are *within a little*, *ἐν ὀλίγῳ*, seem not far from the Kingdom of God, and yet never reach it.

1. Of these some have strong Convictions of the Truth and Reasonableness of Religion; they can't but own that certainly there must be a God of infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, that made them; to whom they are subject, and who can do with them as he pleases. They are convinced of this, when they observe the glorious Frame of the Creation; the Grandeur, Order and Skill that appears in the Universe; and when they consider the Providence of God; how all Things are preserved, directed, and disposed of; how wonderfully God hath often appeared in Defence of his People, and to baffle the Designs of his Enemies; what Care he hath taken of themselves; how constantly he hath provided for them; and how, upon many Occasions, he hath remarkably acted in their Favour; when they attentively observe these Things in the Frame of Nature, and the Conduct of Providence, they find great Reason to conclude there is a God that made the World, that judges in the Earth; and that he is most kind and good to his Creatures.

They

They see also great Reason to believe the Truth of the Scripture, and that there is a Heaven and Hell, and future Judgment; when they must give an Account of themselves to *Christ*. They see Reason, I say, to be convinced of these great Truths, when they consider what plain Characters of Divinity appear in the Bible; what a holy and excellent Doctrine it contains, so agreeable to the Dictates of right Reason, and so much above the Reach of the Wisdom of the greatest Philosopher; and how exactly the Prophecies contained in it have been fulfilled in every Age. How much soever their Lusts would incline them to doubt whether their Souls shall live after Death, or not; whether they shall be judged, and future Rewards and Punishments be prepared for the Righteous and the Wicked, or not; yet they know not how to answer the Reasons so strongly urged for these Truths. Their own Consciences tell them, that God, who is infinitely Wise and Good, must be also a Holy and Just God; that it is not likely he will suffer his holy Laws to be trampled under Foot, without a due Resentment; and that the Welfare and Order of the Universe demands the Punishment of such Transgressors. Their own Sense and Feeling tells them, they have something within them which is really distinct from their Bodies, which thinks and reasons independent of the Body, and therefore may exist without it. The Declarations therefore of the Scripture, concerning the Immortality of the Soul, and the future Account they must give, are so reasonable and probable, they can't but fear they are true; especially when they consider what Evidence there is, that

Christ,

Christ, who hath taught these Truths, came invested with a divine Commission and Authority; which was proved by the mighty Works he wrought in the Face of the whole World, and by his Resurrection from the Dead. Now since *Christ* himself, the Son of God, and the several Apostles in their Writings, all concur to assure us in the Name of God, that *to them who, by patient Continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory and Honour and Immortality, God, the righteous Judge, will render Eternal Life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness; Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil,* Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. These Men I am speaking of, cannot but be convinced of these great Truths; so that they are forced to say sometimes within themselves, "Well, I see there is a great and holy God, to whom I must give an Account. I have great Reason to believe, that I, and all those who do not repent and return to God by *Jesus Christ*, must be miserable for ever; and that there is a blessed and glorious State reserved in Heaven for those who truly fear and serve God by *Jesus Christ*." They have frequently strong Convictions of the Truth and Reasonableness of Religion, and yet they will not stay to come to a thorough Determination, nor give themselves Leave to draw from their Convictions the proper Conclusion to regulate their Conduct.

2. Some have also, at particular Seasons, very serious and lively Impressions made upon their Hearts and Affections by divine Truths. When a Minister hath been laying before them the sad and dan-

dangerous Condition of impenitent Sinners, and thundered out the Terrors of the Law; when he hath so particularly described the Characters of the Hypocrite and the Ungodly, that they cannot but see it to be their own Picture; or when under some Affliction, they have been roused and awakened, they have had for some Time a very lively Sense of the Power of the World to come, and have been under great Convictions of their own Guilt and Misery; been very much moved and affected, *pricked in their Hearts*, ready to cry out, *Alas! What shall I do to be saved?* I see I am in a very miserable Condition; What will become of my poor Soul? So we read of *Felix*, Acts xxiv. 25. that when he heard *Paul* concerning the Faith of Christ, *As he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled.* Thus when the Reasonableness of the divine Commands, the Excellency of the Knowledge of *Christ*, the Riches of his Grace, and the Love and Mercy of God, have been display'd in the Hearing of many, it hath very much affected them; and they have been ready to wish for an Interest in this blessed Saviour, and the great and glorious Blessings of the Gospel. They could not but own, that it is certainly the best and wisest Course they could take, to be mindful of their Duty to God, and to save their Souls. The like Impressions have been often made upon them, when they have met with any Disappointments in the World, and their Expectations from it have been very much balk'd. They see then there is no real Satisfaction or Comfort in this World; that it would be much better for them to seek after God, and get an Interest in his Fa-

vour and Love. Such serious Thoughts, such deep Impressions they sometimes are acquainted with, and yet they have no real lasting Influence upon them, to persuade them to their Duty; they quickly wear off, and they are just the same Men they were before, or with very little Alteration. Do not I speak the Experience of some that hear me this Day?

3. Some are sometimes so far persuaded, as to entertain faint Purposes and Resolutions, and yet cannot bring themselves to a fix'd determined Resolution to become *Christians* in earnest. Under strong Impressions of the Force of divine Truths, of the awful Judgments of God upon Sinners, and the Danger of perishing in everlasting Flames: upon a clear and distinct View of the Excellency and Advantage of Religion, and of the Beauties of Holiness; and especially under the Apprehension of Sickness, Death, and a speedy Entrance into the eternal World, many are ready to resolve they will alter their Course of Life, live in another Manner than they have done, and subject themselves to the Rules of the Gospel. They purpose to forsake this and that Sin, to apply themselves to this and that Duty, and so to become *Christians* indeed; but these are only sudden Motions; when the present Impression is a little worn off, when they come abroad again into the World, to look about them, to taste its Pleasures, or engage in its Business, all their Purposes and Resolutions come to nothing, are quite forgot, as if they had never been, as if the Nature of Things varied just as the Temper of their fickle Minds does; as if those great Things, God, Christ, Heaven, Hell,

Judgment, and Eternity, ceased to be, upon their ceasing to think of them; or as if a few transient good Thoughts, Purposes, and Resolutions, would serve as well as, and instead of real Conversion and holy Obedience. Alas, Sirs! will the great God be thus mocked? Will he be put off with a few good Words?

4. Some are so far persuaded that they actually take some Steps towards being *Christians*. There is a Change made in many Respects in their Course and Behaviour, and yet they are not fully persuaded to become thorough *Christians*. They have got such a Sense of Religion upon their Minds, that they apply themselves to many of the Duties of it; they begin to pray, to read, and to get into the Company of serious *Christians*; they forsake many of the sinful Practices they before allowed themselves in, and there is a great Alteration appears in their Deportment. One would now think they are thoroughly persuaded; that they are become *Christians* in earnest: but alas! if we observe them carefully, we shall find it quite otherwise; their Conversion is but partial. In some Things, that are not contrary to their Worldly Interest, or their fleshly Inclinations and Lusts, they can comply; but when it comes to a Pinch; when there is a Competition between God and the World, *Christ* and some beloved darling Lust, then they plainly shew how Matters stand with them. They have never been thoroughly persuaded to give up themselves heartily, and without Reserve, to God in *Christ*. So *Herod*, in Compliance with *John*, did many Things, and heard him gladly; but would never be persuaded to put away *Herodias*,

his Brother's Wife. No, *John* should be sacrificed, rather than she be displeased. So *Ananias* and *Sapphira* were so far convinced of the Truth of the Gospel, as to make Profession of it; seemed so far sincere, that they sold their Estate, and brought Part of it to the Apostles; yet not so far as to part with all from Love to *Christ*; not so far, but they were in Hopes of deceiving the Apostles, and the Holy Ghost in them, by a Lye.

These Particulars may serve for a Description of the Case of those, who tho' they seem almost persuaded to be *Christians*, to turn to God by *Christ*, yet are not thoroughly persuaded, come to no fixed settled Determination.

II. We come now to consider the Reasons why so many, that have such strong Impressions of Religion made upon their Minds, yet will not be thoroughly engaged in the Practice of it. One might expect, when we see Persons convinced of the great Truths of Religion; when we see them under some serious Impressions, and forming answerable Purposes, nay, and making some considerable Advances towards a Course of Religion, that the desired Work should now be perfected in them, that they should now become *Christians* in Earnest. But after all this, how commonly do we see it miscarry! They are still the Devil's Slaves, led about by him at his Will and Pleasure, still earthly, carnal, and worldly; have no real, thorough, lasting Respect for Religion, but only for so much of it as suits their Conveniency, or is not contrary to their worldly Interest and Pleasure. Whence is this?

I. Not

1. Not for want of sufficient Reasons to persuade them. The Evidence of the Being and Perfections of God, is strong and clear enough to convince the blindest and most harden'd Atheist, if he will attend to it. The Truth of the Scripture, the Certainty of a future Judgment, of Heaven and Hell, is supported by a Variety of Arguments, which they cannot but own to be convincing. The infinite Importance also of Eternity, and the Necessity of making Provision for it, and of taking the Measures prescribed by the Gospel for that End, admit of no Doubt; so that when they set themselves to reason upon these Matters within their own Minds, there is enough to silence their Atheism and Unbelief. It is not therefore for want of Evidence of the great Truths of Religion.

2. But for want of Consideration, and attending to them. Would *Agrippa* have given himself the Trouble of laying together, and considering the Evidences *Paul* brought for the Truth of the Gospel, he would have been not only almost, but altogether persuaded: but he had other Things to mind. Would these Persons I am speaking of, set themselves down seriously to think over the Matter, and weigh with themselves the Reasonableness and Necessity of Repentance, and Subjection to the Gospel: would they give themselves Leave to press the Matter upon their own Consciences, and allow Time for it, answerable to the Importance of the Case, it would have a good Effect; but the Unhappiness of it is, when they have been something moved by a serious Discourse,
or

or upon some other Occasion, have had lively Impressions of Religion made upon their Minds, they go away, suffer their Thoughts to be diverted by Company, or Business, from serious Reflections upon their eternal State; and so all their Convictions and Impressions vanish, and they seem to themselves to have been but in a Dream. Let me appeal to you, Is not this often the Case? Such Persons are described as receiving the Seed sown by the Way Side, *Matth. xiii. 19.* who suffer it to be presently stolen from them. But how unreasonable is this Conduct? Do the Truths which have been impressed upon your Minds, appear certain, great, and important, of infinite Importance to you? And will you not allow Time to reflect upon them, to weigh them seriously with your selves? Should you not impose it upon your selves as a Law, to go Home and pursue this Matter in your serious Thoughts, and see what you have to do? Don't you know by sad Experience, how changeable you are, how soon the Impression will wear off, if due Care be not taken? And does not your Reason tell you how fatal will be the Consequence, if you still go on in a careless Disregard of the great Things of the eternal World? You are now sensible of their infinite Importance; the Spirit of God is now breathing upon your Hearts; improve the happy Moment; strike while the Iron is hot. Whatever Evidence you have now before your Eyes, of the Truth and Necessity of Religion, let it put you immediately upon Measures to secure your acting accordingly, and to continue the same Sense of Things upon your Minds. You have this or that to do, or such a Company to entertain:

tain: And shall these Things rob you of your Souls? better dismish or excuse your selves to that Company, or get out of their Way: better leave that Business to some other Time, than lose the Opportunity of *Christ's* knocking at the Door of your Hearts, and asking for Admittance. If you turn him away for the Sake of these Things, you may, perhaps, never have the Offer repeated. Thus, it is to be feared, an unhappy Person I have read of, found it; who being an Officer in the Army, a little before he went into *Flanders*, came to a Christian Friend, and told him, he had had a great many serious Thoughts of the State of his Soul, and was resolved to lead a new Life: But, says he, there is such a Company I must be with to Night, I wish I could disengage myself from them. He, notwithstanding, went to them, forgot all his serious Thoughts, when with them; plunged himself all Night into the utmost Excess of Drinking, and the next Day went aboard; and the first News his Friend heard of him was, that he was killed; and, as he had Reason to fear, before he had executed those good Purposes he had once entertained. Thus his vain Companions put an End to his serious Thoughts, diverted his good Resolutions, and robbed him of his immortal Soul.

How frequently are the most awakening Discourses made ineffectual on those that heard them with some Concern, for want of their retiring afterwards from Company, to make a due Application to their own Consciences. And give me Leave, my Friends, upon this Occasion, to caution you against a Practice too common, and even upon the Lord's Day, of going into Company after

ter you have been hearing the Word of God; and, it may be, such Company as hath no other Tendency, than to thrust out those serious Thoughts which have been excited by what you have heard. How much better would it be to retire presently into your Closets, to think over the Matter, or at least, to engage in such Discourses as may maintain and promote the good Impressions made upon your Minds. Take heed you do not suffer the Warmth of holy Affections raised in your Breast by any Means to be cooled and extinguished. Take the first Opportunity of reviving them with still greater Efficacy upon the Heart and Conscience.

3. Another Reason of Men's Irresolution, is the Prejudices they have imbibed against Religion. They see a great deal of Reason to approve of the Gospel, of the pure and strict Profession of it, and of the Practice of its several Duties; but they are carried away by various common Prejudices against it; they have been taught to look upon it, perhaps, as Heresy or Schism. It might be an Argument with *Agrippa* against *Paul*, that he was represented as a *Ringleader of the Sect of the Nazarenes*. Give some reproachful Name to the Profession of Religion, this shall be a strong Prejudice against it with many, who would otherwise approve of it. Call it but Heresy or Schism, and then all Arguments for it are answered. Thus says the Apostle, Acts xxiv. 14. *After the Way that they call Heresy, so worship I the God of my Fathers.* And so to call it, was instead of all Arguments against it. Thus many would become religious, but they are afraid of being reproached under some hateful or obnoxious Name: or it is an Objection with them, that

that such and such Men of Note and Figure, do not approve of, or fall in with the Profession. Have any of the Pharisees, or of the Rulers, believed on him? None but mean and ordinary People follow him; such Men are for that which is most in Fashion, and which hath the Privilege of the common Vogue. They cannot bear to be looked upon as singular, or laughed at as precise. But consider; Are we to judge of the Truth of Things by Numbers? Are the Multitude the wisest? Has not true Religion been generally, and in every Age opposed by the Wise and Great Men of the World? Hath it not met with ill Usage, and hard Treatment; with Reproach and Contempt? Will you lose your Souls, for fear of being called by a reproachful Name? Do you fear Men rather than God? If you are afraid to own *Christ* before Men, can you expect to be owned by him at the Great Day? Consider the Truth and Reason of Things; do not suffer yourselves to be carried away by the Sound of Words, by Names, or the Notions and Sentiments of the Vulgar. He is the brave Man, the sincere Christian, whom God will own at last, that pursues what appears to him to be true and good, agreeable to the Word and Will of God; tho' the whole World about him should take the contrary Side, and reproach and vilify him for it.

4. Another Reason is, their Fondness for the World, its Pleasures, and other Advantages. So *Mark* iv. 18, 19. we read of some who heard the Word, *but the Cares of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches, and the Lusts of other Things entering in, choaked the Word, and it became unfruitful.* So *John* xii. 42, 43. *Many among the chief*

Rulers believed on Christ, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God. But let us consider the Unreasonableness of this Conduct. Don't the great Things of the other World appear of such infinite Importance, that nothing can be balanced with them? Will it bear the least Shew of Argument, to expose yourselves to the Anger of Almighty God, and run the Risque of everlasting Misery, for the Sake of some present transitory Pleasures or Enjoyments? *What will it profit a Man, tho' he should gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul?* How dearly shall I pay for the short Enjoyment of a little Pleasure and Diversion, if I must lie for ever in Hell for it? What will it signify to me to be courted and honoured by Men, a few Years in this World, if I must be overwhelmed with everlasting Shame and Confusion? When you think seriously of God, of Heaven and Hell, and Eternity, do not all the Things of this World seem to you as Shadows, and Nothing? And will you, for the Sake of these Shadows and Nothings, disregard those vastly important Concerns?

But at other Times, it may be, your Pleasures, your earthly Enjoyments, appear to be substantial and valuable Things; and the Things of the other World seem like Shadows, or even to vanish out of Sight. But cannot you, in that Case, make use of your Reason? Will not this instruct you, that it is because sensible Enjoyments are present, just before your Eyes, that they seem so great and valuable? Whereas spiritual Things are at a Distance in the other World; and therefore, and for this

this Reason alone, appear to you inconsiderable, or as nothing. You will, in other Cases, use your Reason in Opposition to the Misrepresentations of Sense: You will not prefer a little Cottage in Sight, before a great Palace, and an Estate, in another Country, because you cannot see it; nor a few Guineas lying before your Eyes, to the Promise of a Thousand Pounds; tho' this Sum be not in Possession, and you have no other Security for it than a Piece of Paper. And why should the Presence of the poor transitory Enjoyments of this Life give them the Preference to those infinitely greater and more valuable Enjoyments of the other World, merely because these lie at a Distance, and are only secured to us by Promise, when it is upon the Word and Oath of God himself? Now then, do you find Reason, upon a thorough Consideration of the Matter, to own the Truth and Importance of the eternal World, and the Necessity of governing yourselves by the Rules of the Gospel, in order to your everlasting Happiness? Do not suffer the deceitful Pleasures and little Concerns of this present transitory Life, to cast a Mist before your Eyes, and make you regardless of those Measures that are so confessedly necessary to your Happiness.

5. To add no more; another common Reason, why so many that are almost, cannot yet be thoroughly persuaded to give themselves to *Christ*, according to the Gospel, and devote themselves to a Course of Religion, is the Power and Prevalence of some particular Lust. *Herod* would do many Things, but not part with *Herodias*. His Love to her destroyed all the Force of *John's* Persuasions. *Felix* was very much moved with what *Paul* said

to him; but Covetousness kept fast Hold of him: He hoped that Money would have been given him to let *Paul* go. He would not be persuaded to leave off those unjust oppressive Practices which were so gainful to him. Thus it is with many. They are convinced in their Minds, that Religion and the Service of God is their true Interest; and they make many Resolutions to this Purpose; and many Things in Religion they do; but they can't come to a thorough Resolution of giving up themselves wholly to God in *Christ*, on account of some darling Inclination which they nourish, and cannot part with. In some, the Love of Drink is so bewitching, that for the Sake of it they do Violence to their Consciences, and break thro' their most powerful Convictions. Others are as much enchanted by their Fondness for their vain Companions, or their idle and sinful Sports and Diversions; these rob them of the Time they should spend in their Duty to God; destroy all their Seriousness, and infuse into them a light, loose, and thoughtless Temper of Mind. Others are bound so fast by the Entanglements of loose and impure Desires, or some unreasonable Affections, that all the Attractives of Religion have not Force enough upon them to disengage them, and the Holy and Good Spirit of God can find no Admittance into their Hearts, or, however, it is soon driven away again. These, or some other prevailing Disorders of the Mind, are the strong Holds by which the Devil keeps Possession of their Souls. Sometimes they seem ready to capitulate, and surrender all up to *Christ*; but while this Castle is reserved for Sin and the Devil, all is in vain, the Gate still remains shut
against

against the Lord *Jesus Christ*. Sometimes mere Sloth and Indolence is the Cause of this fatal Neglect. They cannot persuade themselves to take the necessary Pains in Religion; their Indulgence to their fleshly Ease robs them of their Souls. And will you then (poor unhappy Man!) suffer your Reason and Conscience to be enslaved to this unreasonable Lust, to this slothful Temper?

Consider, Is it worth the while for this to lose your Soul, to perish for ever? You tell me you are sensible it is not; and therefore you are sometimes resolved against it; but still you are overcome and carried away contrary to the Conviction of your own Mind. How sad is thy Case! Go, cry mightily to God for Grace and Strength to master thy Lusts. Fix it upon your Mind. You must deny, and oppose, and mortify them, or you are undone. A Man will part with his Leg, his Arm, his Right Eye, rather than lose his Life. When you think of the infinite Importance of your Souls, and the Necessity of saving it, resolve to pluck away from your Heart, tho' it be like tearing the Flesh from the Bones, whatsoever it is that endangers the Loss of your Soul. This will, indeed, be painful, but *better is it to cut off your Right Hand, or put out your Right Eye, than having two Hands, or two Eyes, to be thrown into Hell*, Matt. xviii. 8. You see then what it is that prevents many from giving up themselves sincerely to *Christ*, notwithstanding the Convictions of their own Consciences: And tho' they frequently have appeared to be almost persuaded to do it. You see also, how unreasonable it is to suffer ourselves, by
such

such Means, to be diverted from Measures so absolutely necessary to our Welfare and Happiness.

And now, my Friends, whoever of you have not yet been thoroughly persuaded to devote themselves to a Course of real Religion, notwithstanding all the convincing Arguments that have been laid before you from Time to Time; is it not from some such Principles as these I have mentioned? And can you justify this Sort of Conduct to yourselves? Do you not blush when you think of it? Can you pretend to the Character of Men of Sense and Reason, while you act a Part so mean, so absurd, so unreasonable, in all Respects; and which your own Judgments and Understandings must condemn as much as any one? What shall I say? *Remember this, and shew yourselves Men; bring it again to Mind, O ye Transgressors, Isa. xlvi. 8.* Think the Matter over again, and see whether you can give any better, any good Reason, why you should not yield yourselves to the Service of God in *Christ*.

To give still further Weight to what I have been representing; for I would fain reach the Hearts and Consciences of every one this Day; let me beg your Patience a little while.

III. I represent to you the Aggravations of their unhappy miserable State, who tho' they are often almost, yet are never thoroughly persuaded to be *Christians* in earnest.

There are but two Things I shall insist upon at present.

1. To such Persons their own Consciences will be a terrible Witness against them, as soon as they

find Time and Leisure to bethink themselves : And a long Time and Leisure they will find for it in the other World, if they could not before. They will then reflect ; “ I have often had the great
 “ Concerns of Religion set before my Mind, in a
 “ strong and clear Light. I could not but see
 “ the Truth and Reasonableness of it. I knew
 “ what was fittest and best to be done, but I
 “ would not consider, I would not attend to or
 “ regard it, but wilfully shut my Eyes against the
 “ Light that shone upon me. *I loved Darkneſs*
 “ *rather than Light, because my Deeds were evil ;*
 “ and therefore my Condemnation is most just.
 “ For the Sake of my foolish, vain, accursed Plea-
 “ sures, I have ruined myself for ever. I rushed
 “ forward, and even with my Eyes open (for I
 “ knew what I was doing) to Hell and Destruction. Oh most unaccountable Folly and Mad-
 “ ness ! to let a miserable World so enchant and
 “ delude me, that for the Sake of its vain Shews,
 “ of its foolish Baubles, of its pitiful perishing En-
 “ joyments, I have parted with solid and substan-
 “ tial Happiness, and exposed myself to real and
 “ eternal Sorrows ; and this too, wittingly and
 “ knowingly : For I knew, I very well knew I
 “ could not live and enjoy that foolish World I
 “ was so fond of, always. I knew I must die,
 “ and enter upon an eternal State. My own Rea-
 “ son and Conscience told me I must soon be
 “ judged, and punished with everlasting Pains, if
 “ I did not alter my Course of Life, and obey the
 “ Gospel of *Jesus Christ*. I knew all this : I
 “ could not doubt it ; and yet I went on, mise-
 “ rable distracted Wretch that I was ! to make
 “ sure

“ sure of, to hasten my own Destruction, and to
 “ compleat and finish mine everlasting Damnation.
 “ Oh! that I had never been born, Oh! that I
 “ had never heard of *Christ*, or of the Gospel.
 “ Cursed be the Day that ever it was so fully
 “ preached to me; or rather cursed, for ever cursed
 “ be my Folly and Wickedness, that I slighted
 “ and disregarded it.” These, Sirs, are sad and
 dismal Reflections, but no other than what must
 naturally and necessarily rise in the Minds of those
 who saw, or might have seen, sufficient Evidence
 to convince them of the Truth and Reasonableness
 of Religion, but would never be persuaded hear-
 tily and thoroughly to submit themselves to the
 Belief and Practice of it.

2. That they had been so near the Kingdom
 of God, and yet fell short of it, will be another
 Source of most severe Reflexions, and tormenting
 Agonies. “ I was almost persuaded (will they say
 “ to themselves) to have become a *Christian* in
 “ earnest. I had some Thoughts often about it.
 “ I was sometimes very near coming to a thorough
 “ fixed Resolution. Had I done so; had I gone
 “ a few Steps further, Oh how happy had I been!
 “ I remember, one Day in particular, the Neces-
 “ sity of real Religion was strongly pressed upon
 “ me; it had a great Influence upon my Heart.
 “ I was even just persuaded to take new Measures;
 “ to turn to God, and apply to *Christ* for Mercy
 “ and Grace, and live according to the Gospel.
 “ Had I done so, I should have been as happy as
 “ now I am miserable. Oh! how near was I to
 “ Heaven! but, unhappy Wretch that I was! in-
 “ stead of pursuing those serious Thoughts, and
 “ bringing

“ bringing Matters to a comfortable Issue, I soon
 “ got into some vain and idle Company, which
 “ diverted my Thoughts another Way : I quickly
 “ plunged myself again into worldly Business, or
 “ Pleasures; and so, by Degrees, quite lost all
 “ that quick Sense of eternal Things I had before
 “ upon my Mind; and then went on to add Sin
 “ to Sin, ’till I became ripe for Destruction. Oh
 “ this foolish, inconstant, giddy Heart of mine!
 “ I was, in a manner, escaped from the Wrath to
 “ come; had Heaven and everlasting Happiness
 “ near in View; and God and *Christ* appear’d ready
 “ to receive me with much Mercy and Kindness,
 “ and to make me as happy as any glorious Saint
 “ there; and yet I could not persuade myself to
 “ go on a little further, but, like one distracted,
 “ turned my Back upon Heaven, and returned a-
 “ gain towards everlasting Flames. How was it
 “ possible I could be so senseless, that when I had
 “ a full Sight of the wretched and miserable State
 “ I was in through Sin, and was just persuaded to
 “ leave it, when I saw before me the Happiness
 “ and Glory of the Heavenly State, and was just
 “ ready to enter upon the Way to it, I should suf-
 “ fer myself, by any Company, or worldly Mat-
 “ ters, to be diverted from it; and now I must
 “ lie for ever in insupportable Misery, who was so
 “ near obtaining an inconceivable eternal Happiness
 “ and Glory in Heaven. Oh that I had with In-
 “ dignation rejected the Company, the Tempta-
 “ tions that turned off my good Purposes from
 “ Heaven and my Duty. Cursed be those be-
 “ witching Pleasures, for the Sake of which I have
 “ lost Heaven. Cursed be that wandering, carnal,
 E covetous,

“covetous, ambitious, slothful Heart of mine,
“that led me back to, and plunged me into Hell,
“when I had almost escaped the Danger of it.”
God forbid any here should ever be exposed to such dreadful Reflections. That we may not, let us now, in Time, lay these Things to Heart, and effectually guard against the Danger. If you have any Sense of the infinite Importance of the great Truths of Religion, and how nearly they concern you; go Home, think seriously of them; consider how Matters are with you; press these awful Truths upon your Hearts, till you come to a thorough fixed Resolution of falling in with all the Measures the Gospel prescribes, in order to your everlasting Happiness. Think, “Are not these
“Things true? If so, am I not concerned in them?
“Is it not best? Is it not necessary for me to for-
“sake my Sins, and turn to God, and take Care
“of my Soul, by putting it into the Hands of
“Christ; trusting in, and obeying him, according
“to the Gospel.” And when I consider the sad Consequences of it, if any of you shall be but almost persuaded by all that has been said; I cannot forbear concluding with this Wish of the Apostle Paul, address’d to King Agrippa: *Would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this Day, were even both almost and altogether such as I, except these Bonds.*

A thorough

A thorough DETERMINATION in
RELIGION recommended.

S E R M O N II.

ACTS xxvi. 29.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all those that hear me this Day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds.

WE have, from the foregoing Words of King *Agrippa*, represented the unhappy Case of Multitudes, who have been often under great Impressions, of the Truth and Importance of Religion ; and the Reasonableness of becoming true Christians ; yet, thro' the Influence of this World, and their own Lusts, never come to a thorough Determination, and so perish in their Unbelief.

That this may not be the Case of any of those who hear me this Day, we shall recommend to your serious Consideration, and shall endeavour, as far as we can, to enforce upon the Conscience this affectionate Wish of the Apostle *Paul*, for King *Agrippa*, and all his Audience.

The Apostle expresses himself in a Manner both very forcible and engaging. *Almost*, says Agrippa, *thou persuadest me to be a Christian*. Oh! replies the Apostle, I would to God it were so! not only that thou, but that all that hear me were such: I wish to God, or I could make it my Prayer to God, as the Word signifies, *Ἐυχάμην ἅν τῷ Θεῷ*. The Apostle knew, that all the Success of his Ministry depended upon the Power of Divine Grace. We find him, therefore, frequent in Addresses to God for that Purpose; as well as in his Preaching and Exhortation to Men.

When a Minister is sincerely desirous of the Conversion of his Hearers, he will make it the Matter of his earnest Prayer to God for them; he will plead with God for them, as well as with them for God. When your Ministers have been in vain striving with you Sinners, and persuading you to come and subject yourselves to *Christ*, they have no whither to turn themselves, but unto God, to beg of him to subdue your Hearts to the Obedience of Faith; and when they have any Prospect of succeeding, when Sinners begin to be under serious Impressions, this excites and quickens their Prayers: As *Paul*, when he heard *Agrippa* owning the Impressions made upon him. *I pray to God*, says he, *that thou mayst be not only almost, but altogether a Christian*. So other faithful Ministers earnestly beg of God, that he would be pleased to carry on the Convictions begun upon the Hearts of Sinners, renew and strengthen the Impression, and compleat it in a thorough saving Conversion.

This

This is then the first Instruction we learn from the Words.

Obf. I. That faithful Ministers make the Conversion of their Hearers the Matter of their earnest and fervent Prayers to God.

It appears, that the Impression which *Agrippa* owned was made upon his Mind, in Favour of *Christianity*, gave the Apostle a peculiar Pleasure and Satisfaction, which made him express himself with so much Freedom and Ardour. The Interest of his Lord and Master was more, much more upon his Heart than his own particular Concerns; and therefore he so manages his Defence, as to insinuate, in the strongest Manner, the Evidences of the Truth of the Gospel, and makes Use of that Liberty given him to plead in his own Defence, to defend the Cause of his Lord and Master; and the Success of this Cause he was much more eager upon, than his own Deliverance. Instead of improving the good Disposition the King seemed to be in, to engage him in mediating for himself, he continues to press the Cause of *Christ* and the Gospel, and to recommend it to King *Agrippa*, and all the rest, to be not only almost, but altogether persuaded to become *Christians*.

Obf. II. The Cause and Interest of *Christ*, and the Salvation of Souls, lies nearer to the Heart of every faithful Minister, than any Concerns of his own.

I cannot forbear observing here, that tho' *Agrippa* did not concern himself about what *Paul* was most solicitous to press, yet his Convictions of the Force of the Apostle's Argument had such an Influence upon him, that he spake in his Favour to the

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the *Roman* Governor. Many, tho' they cannot be
persuaded to regard what Ministers say to them for
the Good of their own Souls, yet, cannot forbear
expressing their Esteem for them, and Readiness
to serve them.

Again: From the Freedom that the Apostle
uses here with this King and Noble Audience, we
may learn,

Obs. III. Not to be shy or backward, or when-
ever we have an Opportunity, to plead for *Christ*;
even before the greatest of Men. Some of the Au-
dience might be ready to censure *Paul* as a con-
fident Man, that he should think or talk of mak-
ing King *Agrippa*, *Festus* the *Roman* Governor,
and the rest of the Nobility and Gentry there, *Chri-*
stians; that is, according to the reproachful Lan-
guage of those Times, *Nazarenes*, *Galileans*, He-
retics. How could he have the Assurance to
mention such a Thing? But he knew for whom,
and in what Cause he pleaded; for him who was
the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. He had
sufficient Evidence to support his Assertions; and
therefore he preached the Gospel with all Boldness.
Thus says *David*, Psalm cxix. 46. *I will speak of*
thy Testimonies even before Kings, and will not be
ashamed.

We should not be ashamed to speak and plead
for *Christ*, even before the greatest. There is a
decent Liberty and Freedom to be used upon such
Occasions; a Boldness and Assurance joined with
Modesty, and a due Respect to the Persons we are
addressing, inspired by Zeal for God, and Love to
the Truth; such as always discovered itself in the
Apostle *Paul*, and particularly now.

This

This Modesty and humble Respect of the Apostle to the Company, appears in the Manner in which he expresses himself to *Agrippa*. He insinuates the Reasonableness and Necessity of his entering into a thorough Examination of that great Point then before them; and of coming to a Determination upon it, in the soft Terms of a Wish, or Prayer, which yet did very strongly and forcibly imply the vast Importance of the Case. It is as if he had said; O King *Agrippa*, do not carelessly and slightly throw this Matter out of your Thoughts; do not pass it by as if you had nothing to do in it, as if it were a Matter of small Importance. Your own Conscience, I perceive, tells you, that there appears a great deal of Reason in what I have been asserting, that this *Jesus* whom I preach is the *Christ*, who is risen again from the Dead; through whom alone we can receive Forgiveness and Salvation; and consequently it is not without the utmost Danger, that any turn away from him, or slight his Gospel preached to them. It is a Matter, therefore, that deserves your Consideration and Attention, as you value your own Welfare and Happiness; which are so nearly concerned in it, that I cannot but earnestly beg of God to incline both your Heart, and the Hearts of every one present, to receive and embrace the Gospel; since without it you cannot be saved.

Obs. IV. It is the vast Importance of the Conversion of the Sinners to their Salvation, that makes faithful Ministers so concerned and solicitous about it.

If the Consequences of your Neglect of, and Indifference to the Gospel, did only reach your present

present Interest, brought Ruin upon yourselves and Families here in this World; we who heartily wish for, and delight in your Welfare and Prosperity, and that of your Families, even in this Life, could not but be pressing and importunate in our Advices and Admonitions; but when we consider your everlasting Salvation lies at Stake; that if you do not heartily repent, and turn to God, you must certainly perish for ever; that those who will not submit to the Laws of *Christ*, by a Life of Holiness, shall be punished with everlasting Vengeance; we cannot but do our utmost to snatch you as Firebrands out of the Fire; use all Methods of Address to you, in Season and out of Season; plead with you, and pray for you; that so you may be saved.

It is further remarkable in what Terms the Apostle expresses his Desire that they might all become Christians. *Such*, says he, *as I am*. Perhaps he chose this Way of speaking, as being more soft and engaging, than if he had said, *To be Christians*. *Christian* was then a Term of Reproach; had something in its Sound grating upon, and offensive to their Ears, who were used to hear them spoken of as the Offscouring of all Things. *Paul* therefore spares their Ears, and in less offensive, tho' more forcible Terms, expresses the same Things.

Obs. V. A Regard is to be had to the Weakness of those we converse with, so as to communicate even Truth to them, in Terms the most soft, and least offensive.

That

That which will be borne with, perhaps received and embraced, in one Form of Expression, would be utterly rejected with Contempt and Abhorrence, when delivered in other Words. Of this many Instances might be given, both in teaching Truths, against which Men have been prejudiced; and also in conveying Admonitions and Instructions, for which the Minds and Ears of Men are not sufficiently prepared. *Christians* therefore, and especially Ministers, have need of that Prudence which we may so often observe in the Apostle *Paul*, and especially in the Lord *Jesus Christ*.

But tho' this Way of speaking was more soft, it was equally, or more forcible and expressive; *altogether such a one as I am*. "A *Christian* not only in Name and Profession, which Name I glory in, however reproachful it be in the World; but a true, faithful, and zealous Disciple and Follower of *Jesus Christ*; the same hearty Affection and Zeal for his Kingdom and Interest; the same awful and sincere Regard to his Authority and Laws; the same high Value and Esteem for his Person and Character; the same strong Confidence in his Power and Grace, which I have, I would to God there were in all of you."

In wishing them the same as himself, he shews his hearty Concern for them, and the Value he put upon the Grace of *Christ*.

His hearty Concern for them. He desires they may be as happy as himself. As if he had said; "In wishing you to be *Christians*, I wish you as well as I could myself. Whatever Advantages

“ I am possessed of by the Grace of God, which
 “ are not inconsiderable ; whatsoever Happiness I
 “ have in View, which is unspeakably great, I
 “ earnestly desire it may be communicated to you,
 “ King *Agrippa*, and all present.”

Obf. VI. He that truly loves *Christ*, and the Souls of Men, earnestly desires that all others may have the same affectionate Regard to him, and Interest in him. He wishes all had at least the same Degree of Grace, the same Measure of the Holy Spirit, the same Right and Title to Heaven, and the same Love and Value for *Christ*. Thus the Church, *Cant. v.* endeavours to inspire into the Daughters of *Jerusalem*, the same Esteem and Value for her Beloved; which she felt herself. Do you, *Christians*, truly love *Christ*? Are you his sincere Disciples? You will then sincerely pray, and join with Prayer answerable Endeavours, that all about you, your Relations, Friends, and Neighbours, wherever you can have an Interest, may become with you his Disciples and Subjects: And the same Principle which inspires you with a Concern for, and Care of your own Souls, will make you desirous of the Happiness of theirs.

These Words do also intimate the high Value the Apostle *Paul* had for that Knowledge, and Grace of the Gospel, with which he was favoured. *Such as I am.* Here is implied a secret Comparison between his Condition, and that of King *Agrippa*, and the rest of his Audience; and that his own was so much preferable, that it was the highest of his good Wishes for them, that they might be as he, even tho' he was then in Bonds.

Paul the Prisoner, in low, destitute, and despised Circumstances in the Eyes of the World; and they were great, and noble, and rich, and made a most splendid Appearance; yet the Advantages he had upon the Account of his Interest in the Grace of *Christ*, were so great, that they might justly wish to be as he.

Obf. VII. An Interest in the Grace of *Christ* is much more desirable than all the Riches and Honours of this World. Better be in Prison, and in Rags, with an Interest in *Christ*, than a King without the Knowledge of him: While therefore others are wishing, O that I had raised an Estate of Ten, Twenty, or a Hundred Thousand Pounds, as such and such have done; do you rather say, Would to God I was altogether such a one as this or that good Man, who is eminent in Grace and Love to *Christ*, in Usefulness and Holiness, however low and mean in the World. Do not think the Case of such a one contemptible, who makes a mean Appearance in the World, if he be a true *Christian*. You may with Reason wish to be like him, tho' you were to take his Poverty into the Bargain. Hast thou the Knowledge of *Christ*? an Interest in his Covenant and Grace? be content be thankful; tho' thou hast not the Thousands that others are possessed of, thou hast that which is infinitely more valuable. Let me appeal to yourselves. Was not the Case of *Paul* really preferable to that of King *Agrippa*? He had, indeed, the Favour of the *Roman* Emperor; was, by that Means, possessed of considerable Dominions and Riches, and gratified his Inclinations in

whatever he had a Mind to ; but he perished in his Sins. And where is he now? *Paul* was then indeed in a poor and low Condition, as to the World ; yet he possessed all Things ; he had such an Interest in *Christ* the Lord of all Things, that whatever he wanted he could be sure of. Beside, he was possessed of those rich and glorious Blessings of the Gospel, Heavenly Light and Knowledge, Comfort, Peace, and Joy, which nothing in this World can equal ; and now he shines in Glory amongst the highest Orders of the Saints in Heaven. Who would not be *Paul* the Prisoner, rather than King *Agrippa*?

But that the affectionate Respect he had for them might still the more fully appear, he makes an Exception of those afflictive Circumstances he was then in ; *except these Bonds*. It is impossible to recommend to the Esteem of carnal Men, Religion in Bonds and Afflictions. It could never appear to them desirable to be in *Paul's* Case, while he was a Prisoner. He therefore spares them, and at the same Time lets them know, that though he was truly desirous they might share in his Advantages and Happiness, yet he, by no Means, desires their sharing with him in his Troubles and Afflictions.

Obs. VIII. A truly good Man wishes all as happy as himself, but would have none partake of his Sorrows and Troubles. A contrary Temper indeed, too much prevails in the World: Men grudge at the Felicity and Prosperity of others ; their easy, safe, and flourishing Condition ; especially if they be themselves in Trouble and Affliction. *Solamen miseris*

miseris socios habuisse Doloris, says the Poet. It is a Comfort to the miserable, to have Companions to share their Sorrow; but 'tis an ill-natured Comfort; the Gospel teaches us better; *to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*, Rom. xii. 15. Art thou in Affliction and Trouble, in Poverty and low Circumstances? don't grudge at the Ease or Plenty of others. Be pleased they are free from the Troubles with which thou art exercised, and wish and pray they may continue so. Hast thou an Advantage above others of any kind, don't pride thyself in it, nor despise them; but rather wish, and do what in thee lies to make them as happy as thyself. But to come to that which I have principally in View; I observe,

Obf. IX. That it is the earnest Desire and Prayer of all faithful Ministers of *Christ*, that all that hear them may be not only almost, but altogether persuaded to become the sincere Subjects of *Jesus Christ*.

That thou, and all that hear me this Day, were not only almost, but altogether such as I am.

He alludes to *Agrippa's* Words; not only a little persuaded, but a great deal; *ἐν ὀλίγῳ καὶ ἐν πολλῷ*. He wishes not only that they might be under some Convictions, but strong and powerful Impressions; that they might be fully possessed with a Sense of the Reasonableness and Excellency of the Gospel; of the divine Authority and Dignity of *Christ*; of the Necessity of Faith in him, to their Salvation; that thereupon they might be effectually persuaded to turn from their Sins unto God; and submit themselves to the Lord *Jesus Christ*; not only in Profession, but with their whole

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whole Hearts; devoting themselves entirely to him, in a Course of holy Obedience, in Expectation of everlasting Life and Happiness.

We shall consider more particularly, what it is the Apostle, and every faithful Minister, wishes for all their Hearers; and for what Reason they are so desirous thereof; and then conclude with some Reflections.

I. What is it the Apostle wishes for King *Agrippa*, and the rest of his Audience, and every faithful Minister for all his Hearers. *Altogether such as I am.* The Apostle does not mean in what was peculiar to him as an Apostle, or Teacher. *Are all Apostles? Are all Teachers?* No. Nor was it reasonable to wish that the Body should be all Eye; *Where were then the Hearing?* but that they might have the same precious Faith; be living Members of *Christ*; his faithful Subjects; have an Interest in the Blessings of the Gospel, in the same Manner, and to the same Degree as himself. This then is what Ministers earnestly desire for their Hearers, that they may have a full Conviction and lively Sense of the Truth and Importance of Religion, and particularly of the Gospel; that they may have the saving Knowledge of the Excellency of the Person and Grace of *Jesus Christ*; that they may be fully acquainted with, and have a lively Sense of the Reasonableness and Excellency of the Laws of *Christ*; that their Hearts may be filled with Love to, and Value for *Christ*; and consequently be fully resolved and determined to devote themselves to him in all holy Obedience. And lastly, that they may have an Interest in the Love and Grace of *Christ*, and all the Blessings of the Gospel.

I. That

1. That they may have a lively Sense and full Conviction of the Truth of the Gospel; be not only almost persuaded thereof, but altogether. This the Apostle aims at in the whole of his Discourse, and would have been glad of a further Opportunity, still more and more to convince them, would they but have attended to him. Infidelity lies at the Root of Men's Disobedience to the Gospel. Hence Ministers labour so earnestly to convince Men of the Certainty of divine Truth; of the Being and Perfections of God; of the Reality of a future Judgment; of Heaven and Hell, and all the several Truths of the Gospel. Hence they endeavour to answer every Objection, to resolve every Doubt, and to press upon the Minds of Men the strongest Convictions of the Truth and Necessity of Religion, 2 Corinth. iv. 13. *We having the same Spirit of Faith, according as it is written; I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.* Ministers desire to possess the Minds of others with the same firm Belief, and lively Sense of those Truths, which they themselves have. 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. *For we must all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, &c. Knowing therefore the Terrors of the Lord, we persuade Men.* It is their Grief that Men are so unreasonable as not to submit to the most convincing Evidence, that Things of this Nature can have; on Evidence much beyond what they act upon in all other Cases. Certainly, think they, if Men did believe they must give an Account of themselves to *Christ* the Judge of all, they could never act as they do: And why should they not believe, when the Evidence is so strong and convincing?

2. That

2. That they may have a clear and distinct Knowledge of the Excellency of the Person and Grace of *Christ*. Did our Hearers but know *Christ*, who and what he is, they would certainly love him. *John iv. 10. If thou knewest not the Gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living Water.* We therefore earnestly desire to convey to Men as clear and full Knowledge of *Christ* as possible. We represent and recommend him to our Hearers in the Glories of his Person, as the Son of God, and God with his Father; possessed of the same Divine Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, and cloathed with his supreme Authority and Dominion over all Creatures, in Heaven and Earth, and under the Earth. We desire that all may behold and admire him in the Beauties and Glories of his Love and Grace; manifested in his coming down from Heaven to die for us, and in procuring Pardon, Life, and Glory for us. *I am determined*, says the Apostle, *1 Cor. ii. 2. to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* Not that he would confine his Instructions to that particular Point of Doctrine, but all should centre and terminate there; this should be the grand Subject of his Discourses, to engage their Affections to *Christ*, and their Obedience to his Laws. For *Christ* is preached when his Authority is enforced, his Commands explained, and all the rest of his Doctrine taught, whatever he hath revealed for our Salvation. It is our earnest Desire you may know more and more of *Christ*; being made sensible of the saving Power of his Doctrine in their Hearts. Could we but
 shew

shew you him in all the Wonders of his Grace, and the Beauties of his Holiness, you could not be indifferent to him.

3. We earnestly desire that our Hearers may be fully convinced of the Excellency and Reasonableness of the Laws of *Christ*. Corrupt Nature in Man opposes itself to those Laws, complains of them as grievous, as hard Restraints upon their Inclinations, as difficult or impossible to be obey'd, as insupportable Burdens. We are, upon a thorough Examination, convinced of the contrary, and would be glad to free you from your Prejudices against those Laws; as knowing that they are most reasonable, just, and good, by no means grievous; that the *Yoke of Christ* is *easy*, and his *Burden light*. O that Men would but be persuaded heartily to try, they would find the *Ways of Religion Ways of Pleasantness*, and *all her Paths to be Peace*. They would find it even delightful to deny themselves, and to restrain their own Inclinations; they would reap from it a Pleasure much greater than in gratifying them. Would to God Men did but see how desirable, how honourable, how delightful it is to govern their Passions, to be meek and humble, to be sober and temperate, to restrain and extinguish their Resentments; to maintain in their Breasts a constant Calm, never to be ruffled and disturbed; to be full of Love, Kindness, and Benevolence towards all; to do good to all; and even render Good for Evil; to walk by Faith; to live in a constant Expectation of the Glories of the Heavenly State; to be indifferent to the Things of this Life; to commit themselves and their Concerns to God; to trust all their Af-

fairs in his Hands, and resign with Patience and Submission, without Repining and Discontent to the Orders of Providence; to do the Duties of their several Relations with Love and Affection, with Diligence and Care, with Patience and Self-Denial; submitting to one another, and pleasing one another for mutual Edification. We earnestly desire and endeavour to possess Mens Minds with a Sense of the Excellency of these Rules of the Gospel, of these Graces of the Spirit, and of the Odiousness of the contrary Sins and Vices, and what Uneasiness, Disquietudes, Troubles, and Afflictions, they bring upon Men; that so they may delight in the one, and hate and abhor the other; that they may be persuaded with Pleasure to submit themselves to *Christ* and his Yoke; and cast off that of Sin, as most grievous and insupportable. Could Men be brought to see the Beauty of Holiness, as recommended by the Precepts and Example of *Christ*, certainly they could not but be in Love with it.

4. We earnestly desire that our Hearers may be filled with a high Value for, and Love to *Christ*. So the Apostle prays for the *Ephesians*, Chap. iii. 16--19, *that being rooted and grounded in Love, they might know the Love of Christ, that passeth Knowledge.* So know the Love of *Christ*, as that they might be enflamed with Love to him, and with a View to this the Apostle so often enlarges upon the Riches of the Grace of *Christ*, and represents him every Way so amiable. Many call themselves *Christians*, but are really destitute of Love to him. They do not consider their Obligations to him, nor the Excellency of his Person
and

and Grace ; they seldom think of him, nor maintain Communion with him : This will be no less than the Ruin of their Souls ; for *he that loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha*, 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Compassion for Souls, therefore, as well as Love to *Christ*, may justly raise in every faithful Minister a Concern to inspire their Hearers with Love to him. Hence do they often plead with them ; “ Can you do less than love “ him, who came down from Heaven, to save “ you from Hell and Destruction ; who submitted “ to the greatest Sufferings, and sacrificed his own “ Life for your Salvation ? Is he not worthy of “ your Esteem and Affection, who hath taught “ you the Way to Life and Happiness, and given “ you, in his own Conduct, so perfect a Pattern of “ every excellent Grace and Virtue ? Are you not “ under the highest Obligations to love him, to “ whom you owe all your present Peace and Comfort, and all your future Prospects of Happiness ? “ How can you look him in the Face at the Great “ Day, if you have not the Love of *Christ* in you ? ” We earnestly wish you would love him, not in Word only, but also in Deed and in Truth ; and consequently,

5. That you would sincerely and heartily give up yourselves to *Christ*, in a Course of holy Obedience to his Commands. This it is to be as the Apostle *Paul*. He had wholly given up himself to *Christ*, and followed, and obey'd, and served him with all his Heart ; made it his whole Business to promote his Kingdom and Interest in the World. And we wish that we could persuade all our Hearers to act the same Part. Our Business

is to woo you to *Christ*; to persuade you to yield yourselves to God in him. When we can prevail with any to come to a thorough Resolution, thus to give themselves up to *Christ*, according to the Gospel, how happy are we! What a Grief of Heart must it be to look about our Congregations, and to see so many that have not taken these Measures for their Happiness; that have not openly avowed the Lord to be their God, and *Christ* to be their Saviour and Lord; or having made such Profession, do not act agreeably thereto. We earnestly wish that they would be *Christians*, not only in Name, but in Reality; that they would not think it enough to cry *Lord, Lord*; call him their Lord and Master, but also shew their Regard to him, by doing his Will, and departing from Iniquity. We wish that none may deceive themselves, and ruin their own Souls, by depending upon a bare Profession, while their Hearts are destitute of true Love to God, and Faith in *Christ*. We are afraid and concerned that such and such who come and hear the Word of *Christ* as his People; who join in publick Prayers and Praises, and perhaps come to his Table also, should yet perish at last, because they love this World more than God; and will not, for the Sake of *Christ*, deny themselves, and *mortify the Deeds of the Body*, their sinful Lusts, nor live to God in *Christ*. We heartily pray to God, that those of you who have sometimes good Thoughts, and good Resolutions, may pursue those good Thoughts, and put those good Resolutions into Execution; and not rest satisfied with good Purposes, without answerable, sincere, and effectual Endeavours; for we know

that many will *seek to enter in at last, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii. 14. *The Soul of the Sluggard desires, and hath nothing*, Prov. xiii. 14. We wish and pray, that the serious Impressions made at any Time upon your Minds, in Favour of Religion and your Duty, may end in true Conversion, a fixed determined Resolution of becoming the Lord's; and that nothing may be ever able to divert you from this good Purpose, or persuade you to delay it. We are afraid the World should get into your Hearts, engage your Affections, engross your Time and Thoughts, and make you forget God and *Christ*, your Souls, and Heaven; we earnestly pray it may not, but we cannot but be jealous for your Souls; especially when we see so many Delays in doing the Duty so often press'd, of giving up yourselves to *Christ*, openly and solemnly, at the Lord's Table, and so many Objections and Scruples indulged: We are afraid lest the Devil should, by one Means or other, extinguish the Sense of Religion in your Minds, and so rob us of that Soul we were in Hopes we had gained for *Christ*. We can't but often be wishing and praying, that such and such young Persons, who have had the Advantage of a Religious Education, and, in Consequence thereof, have often had some serious Thoughts about their eternal State, but are but too constantly diverted by either the Pleasures or Business of the World, would be persuaded at length to come to a Resolution of forsaking all, and following *Christ*; of wholly withdrawing themselves from the Entanglements of Sin and Vanity, that they may live to *Christ*, according to the Will of God. We heartily wish and pray,

that

that those who either by their Circumstances in the World, or by their Capacities and Abilities, might be useful Instruments of God's Glory, and do a great deal of Good, would they but thoroughly devote themselves to *Christ* and his Service, might be effectually persuaded to do so with all their Hearts, as being assured, no Service is more honourable than *Christ's*, neither will any turn to better Account. And would to God that those who having put their Hand to the Plow, have looked back again; who having once enter'd themselves into the Service of *Christ*, have grown weary of it, and relinquished it; cast off private Prayer, Christian Watchfulness, and a serious Care of their Ways; deserted the Communion of Saints, and grown careless, earthly, sensual; and, perhaps, loose and dissolute: O that such might, at length, bethink themselves what a dreadful Condition they are plunged into; that it were *better for them not to have known the Way of Righteousness, than after they have known it, to depart from the holy Commandment delivered unto them*, 2 Peter ii. 21. would to God they might be recovered again by his all-powerful Grace, and persuaded to return again to that *Jesus*, from whom they have grievously revolted; that they may be saved from that dreadful Condemnation, which otherwise will certainly come upon them.

We earnestly wish you all an Interest in *Christ*, in all the glorious Blessings of the Gospel. As *Paul* said of the *Israelites*, Rom. x. i. *My Heart's Desire and Prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved*; so faithful Ministers can say of all their People: We wish you all safe and secure from the Miseries

of

of the Damned; your Sins pardoned, and your Souls sanctified by the Grace of the Spirit. We earnestly desire to see you all in the Covenant of Grace, and joined to the Lord. We wish you an Interest in all the Promises of the Gospel, that you might enjoy the Comfort and Benefit of them. We wish you all happy in the Favour of God, the Protection of his special Providence, and the Comforts and Joys of the Holy Ghost; and that in Death you may have presented you a blessed Prospect, upon a good Foundation of everlasting Life and Glory. We wish to see you all, at the Great Day, at the Right Hand of the Judge, received and owned by *Christ*, as the Blessed of his Father. It is our earnest Desire, that none of our Hearers may be excluded out of that blessed and glorious Assembly, who will be continually singing Praises and Hallelujahs to Him that sits upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb, that lives and reigns with him for ever and ever. We cannot tell how to bear the Thought, that any of our Hearers, whose Souls have been committed to our Care, should perish at last with Devils and damned Spirits. To prevent this is the Reason of our earnest Solicitations, of our repeated Exhortations, and of our sincere and fervent Prayers in publick and private. It is your everlasting Salvation, my Friends and Brethren, that is our great Concern; we seek not yours, but you, your Deliverance and Happiness. We see the miserable Condition the Souls of the Generality of Mankind are in; what fast Hold the Devil hath of them; how many various Devices he hath to maintain his Possession. We see what great Love *Christ* hath shewn to Man, in
coming

coming down from Heaven, and dying for their Sakes. We see what glorious Blessings he hath purchased and offered; we would fain persuade as many as we can to fall in with the kind Designs of their Saviour, to fly from the Wrath to come, to make themselves happy, and not reject their own Mercies. Such as these are the Things we earnestly desire and pray for, on your Account; and can we more effectually shew our Respect and Concern for you? Are not these the Things your Happiness depends upon, here and for ever? A thorough Sense of the Reasonableness and Importance of Religion; of the Excellency of the Person, Grace, and Laws of *Christ*; a prevailing Affection to God and *Christ*, and Devotedness to them; and, in Consequence thereof, an Interest in all the Blessings of the Gospel; these are certainly Things worthy of our and your Concern, as will still more fully appear from the Considerations to be represented under the following Head, and which will be the Subject of our next Discourse. God grant we may all of us know the Things that belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes.

A thorough DETERMINATION in
RELIGION recommended.

S E R M O N III.

ACTS xxvi. 29.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all those that hear me this Day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds.

WE shall now proceed to consider what was proposed in the next Place; for what Reasons the Apostle was so concerned for the Conversion of King *Agrippa*, and all that heard him; and why every faithful Minister is so desirous of the Conversion and Salvation of his Hearers. It is because they themselves are so fully convinced of the great Truths of the Gospel; and from their Love to *Christ*, and Zeal for the Glory of God; from the tender Compassion they have for the Souls of Men; from the Experience they have had of the Love and Grace of *Christ*; and because they see how fit and reasonable it is for all Men to turn to God by *Christ*, and foresee the certain Condemnation of all

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those

58 *A thorough* DETERMINATION in Serm. III.
those, who having the Gospel preached to them,
will not obey it, but finally reject it.

1. Their earnest Concern for the Conversion of
their Hearers, proceeds from their firm Belief of
the great Truths of the Gospel. The Apostle
Paul was fully assured of that Doctrine he taught,
and that Salvation was only to be obtained through
Jesus Christ; and therefore expresses so strongly his
warm Desires, that all his Hearers might be per-
suaded to give up themselves to him.

We are, upon the clearest and strongest Evi-
dence, fully persuaded there is a God that governs
the World, to whom we, and all our Hearers,
are accountable. We know in whom we have
believed, and that there is no Name given under
Heaven, whereby we can be saved, but by *Christ*.
We expect to see this *Jesus* come from Heaven,
to render to all according to their Works. We
know that we, and all here present, must come
before his awful Tribunal, and be judged by him,
and therefore *we persuade Men*. We have received
this Doctrine, not only upon Tradition, or the
Opinion of our Teachers; but we have considered
and examined it, and know it upon the best Evi-
dence, that so it is. It is what we have no Doubt
of ourselves, and are sure to be of infinite Import-
tance to all; and therefore would persuade all
Men to *kiss the Son, lest he be angry*; to secure his
Favour, by obeying his Gospel; to prepare to meet
him at the Great Day, with humble Confidence
in his Favour, that they may not be the Objects
of his everlasting Wrath.

2. Their Concern for the Glory of God, and
their Love to *Christ*, is another Reason for their
Earnest-

Earnestness in persuading Men to become the Disciples and Servants of *Christ*. What an Influence this had upon the Apostle, is evident from that remarkable Passage, 2 *Cor.* v. 14, 15. The Love of *Christ* in dying for us, appeared to him to lay us under the strongest Obligations of living to *Christ*, to his Honour and Service; and therefore he was willing to use all Endeavours, to submit to all Exercises of Self-Denial, to promote the Kingdom and Interest of *Christ* in the World, and the Salvation of Souls by him. And faithful Ministers, who have a due Regard to the Honour of God, and a due Sense of their Obligation to *Christ*, will act the same Part. As we have received our Being, and all our Powers from God, so it is but just we should employ those Powers in recommending him to the Love and Veneration of all about us. It cannot but be grievous to see so many live in an impious Neglect of the God that made them, and is continually doing them Good. We would fain recover them, therefore, to some Sense of their Duty to him; and since it is by the Grace of *Jesus Christ*, that Sinners are turn'd to God; and this was the great End for which he came into the World, and set up his Kingdom in it; it cannot but be our earnest Desire and Prayer, that his Kingdom may prevail in the World; and all we are concerned with be brought into it; that thus the divine Government may be re-established in the Earth; Piety, Righteousness, Peace, and Love, with all their blessed Fruits, every where be diffused, to the Glory of God, and his Son *Jesus Christ*.

3. Their tender Concern for the Souls of Men is another Reason of their Solitude for the Conversion of their Hearers.

They are assured that their everlasting State depends upon this very Thing; and know how great is the Value of immortal Souls. Any temporal Loss, how great soever, is but of very small Importance, compared with the Loss of the Soul; That may be made up again; or, however, the Man's Happiness does not depend upon it: But if the Soul be lost, it can never be recovered, the Man is miserable for ever and ever. A Man of any Degree of Humanity, could not bear to see his Fellow Creature in Bodily Pain and Misery, or in Danger of losing his Life, without a tender Concern and Compassion for him; much less can a serious Minister bear to see a Soul in a miserable, dying, perishing Condition, without being most sensibly affected, and using all possible Methods for its Deliverance. Full of this Sense of Things, he joins the most fervent Prayers with the most diligent Endeavours, that, if possible, he may rescue them as Firebrands out of the Fire. Hence his repeated Applications, his importunate Addresses, his earnest Entreaties, that Sinners would consider their own Interest, be sensible of that Danger and Misery that hangs over their Heads; and without Delay fly from the Wrath that is to come: Nor can he be easy 'till he hath some good Reason to hope, that his Prayers and Endeavours have been attended with some good Success.

4. Again, the Experience that faithful Ministers have themselves had of the Love and Grace of *Christ*, makes them desirous that others also
may

may be Partakers of it. They themselves were *by Nature Children of Wrath, even as others*; in the same guilty, wretched, and miserable State: But God, of his infinite Mercy, *having revealed his Son in them*, discovered to them sensibly and experimentally the Riches of his Grace and Love; they *have tasted that the Lord is gracious*; they have known the Goodness and Mercy of God; they are fully apprised of the Excellency of the Knowledge of *Jesus Christ*, having *known him, and the Power of his Resurrection*, and the Greatness of his Love; they know the Value of the Benefits of the Gospel, and how ready *Christ* is to bestow them upon all those that come to him; this makes them so earnestly desirous that others would apply to him, that they might also taste his Goodness, and experience his Love and Grace in the same Manner as they have done. So the Apostle *Paul*, having himself found *the Grace of Christ to be exceeding abundant*, recommends it as a *Pattern to them that should afterward believe on him to Life everlasting*, 1 Timothy i. 14. 16. Whatever Joy or Satisfaction we ourselves feel, we are for communicating it to others, as far as we can, without Prejudice to ourselves. The Satisfaction of the Christian is encreased by making others Partakers of it. “O, thinks he, would to God that
 “others, all the World knew how good, and kind,
 “and compassionate a Redeemer this *Jesus* is:
 “Would to God they did but know what it is to
 “have an Interest in him, as I, through Grace, in
 “some Measure do. What glorious Blessings are
 “these, God hath bestowed on unworthy me!
 “He is as ready to bestow them on others, and
 “will

“ will they not be persuaded to accept of them ?
 “ How great is their Ignorance and Folly ! Did
 “ they but know the Pleasure of Communion with
 “ God ; what there is in that Peace of Conscience,
 “ and Satisfaction of Mind, which arises from the
 “ Sense of the Pardon of Sin, Holiness of Heart
 “ and Life, and the Hopes of everlasting Life and
 “ Glory, they would, without Delay, forsake all
 “ and follow *Christ*.” What the Ministers of *Christ*
 have seen and known of these Things cannot but
 make them wish, that all their Hearers were Partakers
 of the same Grace. As a Person who has been himself
 delivered from Sickness and Pain, and eminent Danger
 of Death, by the Skill and Care of a certain Physician,
 is very desirous to recommend him to others, that are
 in the like afflictive Circumstances ; or as a Rebel, who
 has obtained his Pardon, been received into his Prince’s
 Favour, and treated with the greatest Kindness and
 Condescension, will, when sent to his Fellow Rebels,
 use all his Skill to recommend to them the Mercy and
 Generosity of his Prince, and persuade them to make
 the same Trial of his Goodness and Kindness, as he
 himself has done.

5. Ministers are earnestly concerned for the
 Conversion of all their Hearers to God in *Christ*,
 because they see how fit and reasonable it is. They
 have many the strongest Arguments to use with
 Sinners, to persuade them to become the Servants
 of God in *Christ*. Whatsoever Arguments can be
 drawn, in any Case, from the Consideration of
 Duty, Obligation, or Interest, they can make Use
 of these Arguments with much greater Force than
 in other Cases, to engage Men to be the sincere
 Disciples

Disciples of *Christ*; so that, if in any Case whatsoever Men are to be moved by Reason and Argument, much more in this; that is, if they will at any Time act upon Principles, for some End, and with Reason, or as reasonable Creatures, they must, upon the same Principles and Reasons, and in the Use of the same reasonable Powers, be brought over to the Interest of *Christ*, and of Religion. There are stronger Reasons to persuade Men to be Christians in earnest, to fear God, and obey the Gospel, than there are to do any one Thing in the whole World. Of all this the Ministers of *Christ* have the fullest Conviction. We plainly see how fit and reasonable it is for all to turn to God by *Jesus Christ*, upon the Account of the Relation they stand in to God, and their Dependence upon him, upon the Account of the Character of *Jesus Christ* the Son of God; the miserable Condition that Man is naturally in, and the glorious State to which all true Believers in *Christ* shall be recovered by the Gospel.

I. The Ministers of *Christ* see how fit and reasonable it is for all to turn to God in *Christ*, upon the Account of the Relation they all stand in to God, and their Dependence upon him; and that as he is our common Creator and Owner, our Preserver and Benefactor, and our only Portion and Happiness.

1. When we persuade you to turn to God by *Christ*, we press you to submit yourselves to him, who is our common Creator and Owner; and is it not most just and reasonable we should be His, at his Disposal and Service, who gave us our Being, bestowed on us all our Powers and Faculties,

and made us what we are? If we are capable of doing any Thing, it is God that gave us that Power; ought it not then to be employed in his Service? *He made us, and not we ourselves*; or, as some render it, and *His we are*, Psal. c. 3. And this is true of one and all of us. Had it not been his good Will and Pleasure, you would have been nothing. All you who are here present; you who mind nothing but the pleasing and indulging yourselves, without any Regard to God, to him you owe your Being, and you are his Property; for hath not the Potter a Right to the Vessel which he himself made? Should not every one enjoy the Fruit of his own Labour? We are more entirely the Product of God's Power and Wisdom, than any Thing can be of the Art and Skill of any Creature; since all the Power and Skill of the Creature is dependent and derived; but God was independent, underived, and therefore most properly his own, and consequently gives him the highest Right to what he himself hath made; nor hath he ever past over to others, or quitted this his Right to his Creatures; you are therefore entirely and absolutely God's Right, even all you have and are. God then claims, and we for him, only what is his own. God hath made you reasonable Creatures, fit for, and capable of his Service; it is with Reason therefore, we demand in his Name your Subjection to him; for he that created and gave you Being, can take it away whenever he pleases, or deprive you of every Thing that makes that Being valuable, and so leave you in Circumstances that shall make you wish it as a Favour to be reduced into your original

nal Nothing. From hence also it appears how reasonable it is you should return to God with all your Hearts and Souls, without any Reserve, since you were wholly made by him, and wholly belong to him. He will not suffer any Thing to come in Partner with himself for your Hearts and Affections, since all are his, and he will not part with his Right.

2. It is most reasonable to devote yourselves to the Service of God in *Christ*, as God is your constant Preserver and Benefactor. His Power and Goodness continues to you the Being he gave you, and preserves you from those Calamities, which would either rob you of it, or of the Comfort of it. *In him you live and move, and have your Being.* He preserves your Health, and lengthens out your Days, and *daily loads you with his Benefits.* Whence have you Food and Raiment? Whence the various Enjoyments of Life? From whom have you all those Things you are so ready to doat upon, and which unworthily draw off your Hearts from God? Is it not God that gives you richly all Things to enjoy? Is it not upon his Bounty you live and enjoy yourselves? And is it not reasonable you should live to God, through whom you live? Should you not love and serve him who maintains you, and provides for you? especially when without him you cannot possibly subsist any other Way, and he is nowise obliged to do any Thing for you: Must he be at this Expence for Persons who have no Regard to him, no real Sense of his Favours, no Concern to serve him, tho' under the strictest Obligations to do it: For what Reason? Why should it be expected? Let me ask, in the Name

of God, every one who lives unmindful of God, and his Duty to him, Why Man, should God go on to keep thee by his Providence from all Evil, why should he exercise his Power to preserve thee this Day in Life and Health; give thee Food and Raiment, and other Conveniencies? Under what Obligation is he to do it? And why should you expect it, if you will not employ that Health and Time he grants you of his mere Favour, in his Service? If you will not eat and drink, and do every Thing else to his Glory, as he requires and demands, can you provide for yourselves, without God? Can you do without him? Can you retain your Breath one Moment without him? or enjoy your Food, and other Comforts, one Hour without him? If you can do without God, do so. We will not insist upon that Right and Property which God hath in you, as his Creatures, how well founded soever it be, if you can live and take Care of yourselves without him, and sufficiently provide for your own Comfort and Welfare, we will no longer insist upon your Obligation of living entirely to God, and serving him. But if beside your receiving at first your Being from God, you still depend entirely on him, as it is most certain you do; for the Continuance of your Being and Lives, and have all the Necessaries, Comforts, and Pleasures of Life, wholly from him every Moment, nor can possibly have them, or any of them, but by his free Gift and mere Favour; How reasonable, how necessary is it for you to submit yourselves wholly to him, and to live and act in every Thing according to the Orders he hath given you by his Son *Jesus Christ*.

3. As God is our only Portion and Happiness in *Christ*, it still more appears to be highly reasonable for all to devote themselves to him in *Jesus Christ*. Could any Man find a sufficient Happiness for himself in the Creature, it might seem to justify, in some Measure, the devoting himself wholly to the Pursuit and Enjoyment of that Creature, and the Neglect of God and his Service: Tho' even this could not annul the Right God hath to us, as his Creatures, and upon the Account of our Dependence upon him for the Enjoyment of that which we think so necessary to our Happiness. But God hath so formed us, of a Make and Constitution so refined and excellent, that nothing can be sufficient for our Happiness, but the Enjoyment of himself. Whatever it is in this World we are most fond of, entertain the highest Conceptions of, and expect the greatest Satisfaction from, it only gratifies our inferior Powers and Faculties, our Senses, and our Fancy; and gives no solid satisfactory Entertainment to our Reason and Understanding, the noblest Powers of our Souls: And at best, it is transitory and fading, confined to this Life, and consequently must soon have an End. What we have most valued, how often have we found full of Bitterness, or at best very short of what we expected? How changeable is the Nature of all earthly Enjoyments? How soon are we robbed of them? How soon are we ourselves taken from them? Do not we see it by daily Experience? You that neglect God for the Sake of your Pleasures, How little is there in those Pleasures, when you have them? How soon do they vanish! How soon will you be deprived of the Capacity of enjoying

them! but your Souls, and Desires after Happiness, will still remain. You who are so greedy after Riches, who are so busy in heaping up the Wealth of this World, that for it you neglect your Duty to God, and the Care of your Souls, what will Riches do for you? What mighty Advantage do you expect from them? Can they give you any real Comfort or Satisfaction, without the Favour of God and his Blessing? What if you have your Thousands, if you have not God for your Portion, and an Interest in him, as your reconciled God in *Christ*? Will those Thousands set your Mind at Rest, give Peace and Ease to your Consciences, or the comfortable Enjoyment of yourselves? Will they support you in Death, or do you any Good in the eternal World? Can you carry them along with you to the Grave, or enjoy them there? What are all these Things to you, when you must leave them, and perhaps very soon, behind you?

But God is the full, perfect, eternal Portion and Happiness of his Creatures. *His Favour is better than Life*, for it will secure to you everlasting Life, when this temporal Life is ended. *His Love is better than Wine*, more valuable than the most pleasurable Enjoyments; for it gives a more entire and solid Pleasure, an inward lasting Satisfaction. He will make both Body and Soul happy, beyond all Conception, here and forever. Now this is not only true in the general, but is a Truth that concerns every particular Person. There is not one of all our Hearers, but they stand in need of God, as their chief Good, and only Portion. If you are not sensible of it now, you will be so hereafter. You will certainly find it so, whoever you be,
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that have now no serious Thoughts of this Matter. You will be convinced how much you need the Divine Favour then, when Trouble and Affliction comes upon you: Then, when Sickness and Pain seizes you: Then, when you lie upon a Death-bed, and this World, and every Thing in it, becomes incapable of giving you Relief, and is vanishing out of Sight. You will then see that nothing but God can be your Comfort and Support. This, we are sure, you will one Day, every one of you, be fully convinced of; and if we are called to assist you in your last Moments, we doubt not, you will then be forced to acknowledge it. We therefore, who seek the Comfort, Welfare, and Happiness of every single Person amongst you, and expect, in a little Time, to be standing by your Death-beds, unless first laid upon our own, earnestly desire you would secure an Interest in God, as your Portion; that instead of taking so much Pains for that *which satisfies not, which is not Bread*, which we know you will one Day confess to be nothing, you would seek after that which is truly good. *Incline your Ear, and hearken to the Gospel, that your Souls may delight in Fatness*; in those Pleasures and Enjoyments which result from the Favour and Love of God in Christ, and an assured Prospect of the everlasting Enjoyment of him in Heaven, *Isa. lv. 2, 3*. We know that in God alone your Happiness lies, and not in this World, or any Thing here. We have often heard dying Persons acknowledge this. We are sure you will one Day be in the same Circumstances, and consequently of the same Mind; and therefore we press you to secure the Favour of God, by giving

up yourselves to *Christ*, according to the Gospel; and that you would do this speedily, and without Delay; that you would not only entertain some Thoughts about it, but come to a thorough fixed Resolution.

Such as these are the Arguments we have to plead with you, from your Relation to God, and Dependence upon him, as your Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and only Portion and Happiness.

II. We cannot but be very pressing with you to be not only almost, but altogether persuaded to be the Servants and Disciples of *Christ*, when we consider the Character of this *Jesus Christ* the Son of God. He is the alone Mediator between God and Man, by whom we have Access to God, and derive all Blessings from him. It is only in and through him, that we can have any Interest in God as our Portion. Besides, as hath been observed, he was before all Worlds the *only begotten Son of God*, the *Brightness of his Father's Glory*, the *express Image of his Person*; possessed of the Divine Glory and Perfection, in such a Manner, as that all that *the Father hath is His; the Father being in Him, and He in the Father*. In him, therefore, dwells infinite Power and Wisdom, and inexhaustible Goodness and Love; *even the Fulness of all the Godhead bodily*. All the Power, Authority, and Dominion of the Father, is in his Hand, managed and executed by him, without any Restraint or Limitation. Of all this we have the fullest Evidence in the Gospel. Can there be therefore any Argument wanting to persuade every one to submit to him, who hath in his Hand Almighty Power,

Power, to punish and destroy the Enemies and Rebels against his own and his Father's Authority; to Him, *in whom are all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, all the Fulness of Grace to save and reward his faithful Servants. To Him who, with the Father, hath the absolute Dominion over all Creatures, the Sovereign Disposal of their eternal State, and from and through whom all that Good, that Felicity and Blessedness, which we expect from the Fulness of the Godhead, must be derived and received? May we not plead with you his matchless Love in coming down from Heaven, and taking Part of our Nature, so infinitely below himself, for your Salvation? Did he not for the same End submit to a Variety of grievous Sorrows and Sufferings, and cursed Death of the Cross? All this for thy Sake, O Man, who art thoughtless of him, regardless of his Love, and perhaps doubtful, and in Suspence, whether to devote thyself to him or not, to deliver thee from Death and Hell, and make thee for ever happy? Have we not the fullest Evidence of these Truths? that this *Jesus* did really come from God, and that he hath this Power we speak of? Were there not exactly fulfilled in him all the Predictions that were delivered from the Foundation of the World, concerning the Messiah of God? Was not the very Time of his Coming limited in general Terms by *Jacob*, and particularly and expressly by *Daniel*? And was it not at that very Time that *Jesus Christ* appeared, and professed himself the long promised Messiah, without any to rival him in those Pretensions? And, as was before observed, do not the many Miracles it is certain he wrought in the Presence

Presence of Thousands, and his Resurrection attested by Men of unquestionable Credit, who sealed the Truth of it with their Blood, without any Prospect of Worldly Advantage? Doth not this, beyond all Contradiction, confirm our Faith in him, and assure us, that as he rose from the Dead, so he will raise us up, and judge the World in Righteousness? Does not the Excellency of his Doctrine, every Way worthy of God, and so conducive to the Happiness of Men, and the Power of it upon the Hearts of Men, producing such admirable Effects, where cordially embraced, plainly shew it to be Divine? And consequently, is it not a most evident certain Truth, that every one of you that hear me this Day must appear before him at the Great Day, and be judged by him, either to everlasting Happiness or Misery, according as you have behaved towards him? It is with great Reason therefore, we press you now in due Time to subject yourselves to *Christ*, apply for his Grace, and secure an Interest in his Favour; since it is only through and from him you can obtain Salvation and everlasting Happiness.

III. The miserable Condition that all are in, 'till renewed by the Grace of *Christ*, is another Reason why all should come to *Christ*, and give up themselves to him. Mankind is in a State of Apostacy and Rebellion against God. The Sinfulness of our Nature, and the many actual Transgressions with which we all stand charged at the Bar of God, make us incapable of Happiness in his Favour, and exposes us to his severest Judgments: For he is a just and holy God, and hateth Sin with a perfect Hatred. The Blindness of our Minds, and the
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Confusion and Darkness of our Understandings; the Irregularity of the Motions of our Souls; our Fondness for Vanity, and Indifferency to Things of greatest Importance and Excellency; our being estranged from the God that made us, in whom is all our Happiness; our Loss of his Image, our original Glory and Excellency, the Power and Influence of the Devil upon us, and our unhappy Subjection to him; the frail and perishing Condition of this Life, liable to so many Necessities, Sorrows, and Miseries; but above all, that eternal Misery to which every one by Nature is exposed, through Sin; all this shews what Need we have to take some effectual Measures for our Relief. But we cannot help ourselves. We are apt to be fond of our Distemper, and are stupid and insensible of our Danger and Misery. Nothing can rescue us from it, but a serious Application to *Christ*, and giving up ourselves to him, according to the Gospel. *There is no other Name given under Heaven, whereby we can be saved.* He was sent to proclaim Liberty to the Captives, and the opening of the Prison to them that are bound, Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 3. The Condition I have been describing is the Case of every one here, 'till converted to *Christ*, Eph. xi. 2, 3. You are insensible of it, it may be; value yourselves upon your Estate, your good Circumstances in the World, your Wit and Parts, and the like: But we, from the Word of God, must declare to you, *you are wretched and miserable, poor and blind, and naked*, Revel. iii. 17, 18. Be persuaded then to apply seriously to *Christ*, for *Wisdom* to enlighten and direct you, *Righteousness* to justify you, *Redemption* to save from Death and

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Hell, and *Sanctification* to rectify the Disorders of your Nature, and inspire every good Disposition. Will you chuse to be sick and in Pain, when you may have Relief? Will you be poor, and destitute, and miserable, when you may be rich and happy? Will you be content to be the Objects of God's Anger and Hatred; the Pity of the Angels and all good Men, and the Scorn and Triumph of the Devils, when you might be the Favourites of Heaven, the Delight and Joy of all good Men, and the Glory of *Christ*? The miserable State that all are in by Nature, makes it very reasonable, absolutely necessary for all to give up themselves to *Christ*, that they may obtain Deliverance and Salvation; which Argument receives further Strength, if we consider,

IV. The happy and glorious State to which all those shall be recovered, who truly believe in *Christ*, unfeignedly submitting themselves to him, according to the Gospel. You will then be freed from the Guilt of Sin, all the Uneasinesses of an accusing Conscience, all the fearful Expectations of God's everlasting Wrath and Vengeance: You will enjoy that Peace of Conscience, that sweet Composure and Tranquility of Mind, which is more desirable than the greatest Estate; and which would make you happy in the lowest Circumstances; which, for its Excellency, *passeth all Understanding*: None knows its Value, but he who has it. You will, by the Power of the Grace of *Christ*, gain the Victory over those irregular Inclinations, and those unruly Passions, which create you so much Uneasiness and Disquietude, so much Shame, and such bitter Reflections. A glorious
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and divine Light will be shed abroad into your Minds, and discover to you the most noble and sublime Objects; God and *Christ*, in all their Glory, Heaven and Eternity, and all the Wonders of the Gospel, and of the eternal World. There will be given you a spiritual Discernment, by which you will see these Things in another, and more affecting Light than ever you did before.

By putting yourselves entirely into the Hands, and under the Conduct of the Lord *Jesus Christ*, you will be enabled to act in a more noble and excellent Manner than others; *being filled with the Knowledge of the Will of God, in all Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding*, you will obtain Strength to *walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good Work, and increasing in the Knowledge of the Lord*. The several Graces of the Holy Spirit, which are the Image of God, the Glory of the Divine Nature, will be communicated to you, and make you most glorious and lovely in the Eyes of God and Men. And as to the Sorrows and Troubles of Life, though you will not be wholly exempted from them at the present, yet you shall be kept from the Evil of them, and supported under them. They shall be turned into the most valuable Blessings, and be the Means and Occasion of your enjoying more abundant Tokens of the Favour of God. Add to this, the Privilege, Honour, and Pleasure of Communion with God and *Christ*, and with the glorious Assembly of the First-born in Heaven; God's special Care and Providence; a blessed Victory over Death, the Sting and Power of it; a glorious Resurrection, and a State of Blessedness and Immortality; when every

Imperfection shall be done away, with all Sorrow and Misery; when you shall be possessed of unspeakable Pleasures and Joys; compared with which, the Enjoyments of this Life are childish Follies, vain and trifling Amusements. When the Soul shall be advanced to the highest Perfection of Wisdom and Holiness, and enjoy a Happiness which shall never end; but after many Years shall I say? after Thousands and Millions of Ages, remain as fresh and new as ever it was, and be continually improving and encreasing. This is the glorious State to which the Grace of the Gospel will exalt all those who sincerely and heartily give themselves up to *Christ*, and the one Half has not been told. Now Sirs, what think you? Are these Things only Dreams and Fancies? Is there any Thing solid in them? Are they desirable? Are they real? Can you then be indifferent to them? Is there any one amongst you who is regardless of an Interest in these Advantages? Suffer us, my Friends, suffer us to wish you well, to persuade you to be happy, to beg of you not to reject your own Mercies. Are the *Pleasures of Sin, which are but for a Season*, to be compared with these Pleasures and Joys? Do the Vanities of this fleeting World bear any Proportion to these solid lasting Advantages? How often do we hear Men talk with Rapture of the Thousands and Ten Thousands that such and such are possessed of? And this they are ready to look upon as the Top Stone of Happiness; But what are these, but so many Thousand Pebble Stones compared with the Portion and Inheritance of the Christian? Well, this is the State to which *Christ* will bring you, if you will

will submit to him with your whole Heart, if you will give yourselves up wholly to be guided and directed by his Word and Spirit. And to this happy and glorious State we would fain have every one of you advanced.

V. And we are the more solicitous about this Matter, because we know and foresee the certain Condemnation of all those, who having the Gospel preached to them, will not be thoroughly persuaded to submit themselves sincerely and heartily to it. For we hear *Christ* himself declaring, *He that believeth not the Son, shall not see Life, but the Wrath of God abideth on him*, John iii. 36. We hear his Spirit assuring us by his Apostle, that *Christ will come in flaming Fire, to take Vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 2 Thes. i. 8, 9. We know the Punishment will be so grievous, that *Christ* assures us, *it will be more tolerable for Sodom, in the Day of Judgment, than for such Persons*, Matth. xi. 24. This we know will be true of every single Person, even of this Assembly, of whatever Rank, Age, or Circumstance, who live and die in their Sins, who prefer the World and its Interests to God, and *Christ*, and Heaven; who live in the Neglect of their Duty to God, and without a constant Dependence upon, and Submission to the Lord *Jesus Christ*, according to the Gospel. We do not see it possible for them to escape; we cannot find the least Intimation of any Reserve of Mercy for them at the Great Day; but, on the contrary, the most awful Denunciations, the most express Declarations and Assurances, that they shall go into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.

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The Punishment is every where represented as extreme and intolerable, expressed by all the most dreadful Images, of a *Prison*, of *Chains*, of *Darkness*, of *Fire unquenchable*, of *Wrath to the uttermost*. A Punishment that will fill the Soul with Vexation and Anguish, be the Spring of incessant Tears, and produce gnashing of Teeth, the extreme Agony and Vexation in their Souls. *We therefore, knowing the Terrors of the Lord, persuade Men*, 2 Cor. v. 11. We would not have any of you perish, and therefore labour earnestly to prevent it, if possible.

You see, therefore, for how many and weighty Reasons we so earnestly desire and endeavour to persuade you to come to a full Determination of becoming in earnest the Disciples and Followers of *Jesus Christ*. The Assurance we have of the Reality and Importance of the great Truths of Religion, and particularly of the Gospel; a due Concern for the Honour of God and *Christ*; the Experience we have had of the Excellency of the Love of *Christ*; our Convictions of the Reasonableness of Men's devoting themselves to the Service of God in *Christ*; considering their Relation to God, as their Creator, Owner, Benefactor, and only Portion and Happiness: The Character also of *Jesus Christ* the Son of God, who by so many Evidences appears to be an all-sufficient Saviour: The miserable State all are in, 'till renewed by the Grace of *Christ*, and the happy and glorious State to which they may be recovered by that Grace. These Considerations, together with that dreadful Condemnation, to which those are subject who reject the Gospel, when fully preached to them, are suf-

ficient to raise in us the greatest Concern, and put us upon using our utmost Endeavours to persuade Men to be *Christians* in earnest.

And now, to bring all we have said to the desired Issue.

Had the Apostle, have all Ministers so much Reason earnestly to desire the Conversion of their Hearers? And shall they not be concern'd for themselves, and their own Salvation? All these Considerations which have justly so much Weight with your Ministers, to excite their Concern for you, do not they deserve to be laid to Heart by yourselves? Is it not your own Interest, your everlasting Happiness that lies at Stake? Life and Salvation by *Jesus Christ* hath now been laid before you, and the most persuasive Reasons offered to engage you to secure it: Will you then reject your own Mercies, and persist in your Unbelief, and Disregard to Religion and the Gospel? Let me entreat you to review at Leisure, and in your private Retirements, the several Reasons you have heard in Favour of your Duty to God, and a hearty Subjection to the Gospel: See if they have not Weight, if they do not claim your Regard, if you cannot but acknowledge their Force, and therefore are convinced how reasonable it is to enter upon a Course of Religion, apply yourselves without Delay to what appears so fitting and reasonable. Don't suffer the Impressions to wear off. Take all Opportunities of renewing it by serious Consideration, and by all those Methods in which divine Truths may be often brought to your Minds, and powerfully impress'd upon your Consciences; such as reading and hearing the most edifying Discourses

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on Religion, and a free intimate Conversation upon those Subjects with wise and pious Persons. Some still indulge themselves in a careless Indifference, at least remain in Suspence about a Course of Religion, from a secret Diffidence of its Truth and Reality, arising from some Difficulties and Objections against either Natural or Reveal'd Religion, they have met with in Reading or Conversation. But let such be entreated to consider that there is nothing so true and important, against which Difficulties and Objections may not be raised; and therefore, in the great Affairs of Life, Men never make that a sufficient Reason for not acting at all, but rather set themselves to weigh the Arguments on each Side of the Question, in Proportion to the Importance of it, and determine themselves by those which appear to have the greatest Weight. And is it not reasonable we should act the same Part in the present Case, on which our everlasting Welfare depends? Can we be supposed to be sincere, or find any Favour, or even Excuse, with our great Judge at last, if we will not be at the Pains to enquire into what appears to be, of all other Things, the most momentous? If, therefore, you are under any Doubt or Uncertainty about the great Truths of Religion, endeavour to raise in your Minds a just Concern that you may obtain Satisfaction; be willing, be heartily desirous to know the Truth, and resolve to submit to it; and make it your earnest Prayer to God, to enlighten your Minds, and lead you into the right Knowledge of himself, and of all those Truths on which your Happiness depends; and then take all proper Methods for Information, whether by Reading or Con-
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versation, consulting those who are best acquainted with the great Things of Religion, and seem most likely faithfully to assist and inform you. Those who eagerly lay Hold of every Objection against Religion, that comes in their Way, but will not be at the Trouble, either thoroughly to examine it themselves, or to seek for Satisfaction from those who are capable of giving it, give but too plain Proofs they are not sincerely desirous to know the Truth; but rather to find some Pretence to make their Conscience easy in the Neglect of their Duty. But alas! the Time will come, when their Insincerity, and real Averfion to God and Goodness, will be made manifest to themselves, as it is already to the World about them.

Let those who lay such Strefs upon the Objections raised against Religion by Men of unsettled Minds, seriously examine themselves by what Principles they are governed. Is it not that they may have the freer Scope to indulge their irregular Inclinations? Is it not that they may set themselves at Liberty from the Fear of future Judgment, and the Restraint of the divine Authority? Is it not that they may deliver themselves from the Obligation of those Religious Exercifes, which are so burdensome to their earthly Minds? But to be prejudiced against Religion upon such Principles, must appear upon Examination to be wholly unreasonable. Whatever Restraints Religion, whether Natural or Revealed, lays us under, they are no other than what are necessary for our own Interest, and that of the World about us, as has been abundantly proved both by the Reasonings and Experience of the wisest and best of Men in all Ages:

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And why should we be so desirous of Liberty to make ourselves, and others about us, miserable? Nor is it at all more reasonable to be so solicitous to free ourselves from the Dread of the divine Displeasure, by rejecting all Religion, as many are. For could Men really persuade themselves there is no God, or that he does not concern himself about human Affairs, or Mens moral Conduct, this will not alter the Nature of Things, destroy the Divine Being, or his Moral Government; nor be any just Excuse for their Neglect of their Duty; they are but so much the more exposed to the divine Resentment, who sees the Insincerity of their Hearts, and the mean and base Principles they act upon. I say mean and base Principles; for why should they be apprehensive of the Displeasure of an infinitely Wise, Good, and Righteous God, but for the Sake of some unreasonable criminal Indulgences, they would secure to themselves? He who desires to act reasonably, and as he ought to do, hath nothing to fear from God or his Judgments; nor from any Thing in either Natural or Revealed Religion, but meets with every Thing there to support and entertain, and delight him; every one of the Doctrines of Religion tending to establish and increase his Peace, Pleasure, and Joy. And those Exercises of Religion against which Men are so much prejudiced, if rightly understood and attended to, will all be found to contribute to the same End, far from being burdensome Tasks. For what can be more pleasing to a well-tempered Mind, than to employ himself in cultivating an Acquaintance with, and contemplating the most excellent and perfect of all Beings, viewing the se-

veral Discoveries of his astonishing Power, Wisdom, and Goodness in his Works and Word, and raising correspondent Sentiments of Admiration, Esteem, and Love? What more reasonable and agreeable than to be often paying due Homage and Acknowledgments to, and imploring the Favour of the great and merciful Creator and Governor of the Universe; of whose Care and Goodness we, and innumerable other Beings, are so continually reaping the Benefit? And what more fitting and more comfortable to a Mind daly sensible of its Weakness, Follies, Guilt, and Misery, than humbly to confess before God his innumerable Transgressions, imploring Pardon and Grace through *Jesus Christ*, the appointed Mediator between God and Man? But it would carry me too far to shew with how little Reason Men are prejudiced against the several Exercises of Religion; to represent how useful they be to the most excellent Purposes, and what a Source of Satisfaction and Enjoyment to all well regulated Minds. Since then there are all manner of Reasons to persuade to the hearty Belief and Practice of Religion, and no just Objections against it, let none remain any longer in Suspence, or indifferent about it, but come to an immediate and fix'd Resolution of devoting themselves to it. Look to God in *Christ* for those divine Assistances which are absolutely necessary to enable you to begin and carry on so important an Undertaking. Pray earnestly to God for his Grace, thoroughly to change your Hearts, and to give you the saving Knowledge of *Christ*. Beg of him, that he would not suffer good Impressions to wear off, and good Resolutions to prove abortive. Tell him you are sensible of your

Changeableness and Inconstancy, you dread to think of your growing cold, careless, worldly, and hardened again: Intreat him to work so powerfully effectually, and constantly, by his Holy Spirit upon you, that you may cleave to the Lord with Purpose of the Heart unto the End: And for your Encouragement know, *He that seeks shall find*. Such Prayers and Desires shall not be in vain. If you continue waiting upon God in the Way of your Duty, it will certainly issue in Peace, Comfort, and everlasting Joy.

As for those who are, by the Grace of God thoroughly persuaded to be sincere Christians, bless God for his Grace to you and in you, ascribing all to the Glory of the Free Grace of God; endeavour after still greater Measures of Grace and Zeal, of Love to *Christ*, and Activity in his Service; *growing in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 2 Pet. iii. 18. and hold out to the End, continually waiting for the Salvation of God: Which God, of his infinite Mercy, grant to us all, through our Lord *Jesus Christ*.



F I N I S.
